64 PAGES OF VINTAGE EC HORROR!

TALES FROM THE CRYPT PRESENTS THE HAUNT OF FEAR

NO. 3
JAN

2.00
2.50
CANADA

FEATURING...

THE OLD WITCH

THE VAULT-KEEPER

THE CRYPT-KEEPER

THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE HEE! WELL, *HOP* INTO THE *HAUNT HUNGRY HIBIOTS* THIS IS *THE OLD WITCH*, YOUR *SHIVER-CHEF* STEWING ANOTHER *SCREAM-SNACK* IN HER *CRUDDY CAULDRON*. I HOPE YOU HAVEN'T *EATEN* ALREADY BECAUSE IF YOU *HAVE* WELL COME CLOSER TO THE *CAULDRON* JUST IN CASE I'D HATE TO HAVE THE FLOOR MESSED UP WHILE I'M NARRATING MY *NAUSEATING NOVELETTE* BESIDES THE OLD RECIPE *NEEDS* A LITTLE FLAVORING! AND NOW, READ *EMILE'S* STORY IN HIS *OWN WORDS* HE *CALLS* IT

SUCKER BAIT!

I WALK SLOWLY THROUGH THE DESERTED NIGHT STREETS AND I LISTEN TO THE TERRIFIED SILENCE OF MY TOWN. I LISTEN TO THE STILLNESS OF ITS LOCKED DOORS AND SHUTTERED WINDOWS, AND I CAN ALMOST HEAR THE FRIGHTENED BREATHING OF THE PEOPLE HIDING BEHIND THEM. I LISTEN TO THE QUICK HEAVY FOOTSTEPS FOLLOWING ME GROWING NEARER. MY HANDS ARE COLD AND MY BLOOD POUNDS THROUGH MY SHIVERING BODY. BUT I AM NOT AFRAID. EVEN THOUGH I KNOW I AM GOING TO DIE, I AM NOT AFRAID. FOR I AM TO BE THE *VAMPIRE'S LAST VICTIM.*

NO MORE WILL THE ROIN PEOPLE OF MY TOWN WRITHE IN THE GRIP OF FEAR. NO MORE WILL EACH DAWN FEED INTO THE DARK STILL MORNINGS AND SEE ANOTHER BLOODLESS CORPSE. FOR THEY WILL FIND HIM NOW. THEY WILL FIND MY BODY AND THEN THEY WILL FIND THE VAMPIRE AND DRIVE A STAKE THROUGH HIS CURSED INHUMAN HEART. THE FOOTSTEPS BEHIND ME ARE CLOSER NOW.

I THINK OF STANLEY, MY OLDER BROTHER, SILENTLY WORKING AT HIS NIS LATHE OR HIS DRILL PRESS OR WHATEVER HE DOES AT HIS JOB ON THE NIGHT SHIFT AT THE FACTORY. AND I THINK OF THE SADNESS THAT WILL BE IN HIS FACE AND THE SILENT BLACK BAND ENCIRCLING HIS STRONG ARM...

AND THEN I THINK OF MY FATHER... WHITE AND RIGID, NEVER MORE TO SMILE OR LAUGH OR SING SONGS... MY FATHER... LYING DEAD IN THE TOWN'S ONLY FUNERAL PARLOR WITH NO BLOOD TO DRAIN FROM HIS PUNCTURED BODY...

SUDDENLY THE WHITE RIGIDITY IN MY FATHER'S FACE IS GONE, AND THE SADNESS IN MY BROTHER'S FACE HAS DISAPPEARED AND THEY ARE BOTH SMILING AND LAUGHING AND WAVING AT ME AS I STEP OFF THE TRAIN...

POP! STAN! — THERE HE IS! — MY BOY! EMILE

YES. THE NIGHT BEFORE LAST, MY FATHER WAS ALIVE AND THERE WAS NO SILENT BLACK BAND ON MY BROTHER'S ARM. THEY HAD COME DOWN TO THE STATION TO MEET ME. I HAD COME HOME... HOME AFTER FOUR YEARS OF COLLEGE.

POP! IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU! — EMILE! YOU LOOK SO WELL! I'M PROUD OF YOU, EMILE. — ME TOO, EMILE...

JUST THINK, STANLEY! MY BOY. YOUR BROTHER EMILE... A COLLEGE GRADUATE. A CHEMIST...

I OWE IT ALL TO YOU... BOTH OF YOU. YOU WERE RESPONSIBLE. YOU PAID MY WAY. I CAN NEVER FULLY REPAY YOU. BUT I'LL TRY HONESTLY. I'LL TRY!

AW, CUT IT, EMILE. LET ME CARRY YOUR BAGS HERE...

CAREFUL, STAN. E HAVE SOME EQUIPMENT IN THEM.

COME, EMILE. COME... LET'S GO HOME...

THAT WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE LAST I REMEMBER IT ALL SO CLEARLY. WE WALKED HOME, ARM IN ARM, THROUGH THE DESERTED STREETS

WHERE... WHERE IS EVERYBODY STAN? WHERE'S ALL THE FOLKS?

LOCKED UP BEHIND THEIR DOORS

HE DOESN'T KNOW POP! HE DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT THE VAMPIRE!

THE VAMPIRE? WHAT VAMPIRE? WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?

THE TOWN IS BEING TERRORIZED BY A VAMPIRE, EMILE! TWELVE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN MURDERED ALREADY THEIR BLOOD SUCKED FROM THEIR BODIES TWELVE PEOPLE IN TWELVE DAYS.

IS... IS THIS TRUE, POP?

YES, EMILE. IT... IT'S TRUE BUT MAYBE, NOW THAT YOU'RE HOME...

AW, POP! WHAT COULD EMILE DO? IT DOESN'T TAKE A COLLEGE EDUCATION TO CATCH A VAMPIRE!

THE HOUSE WAS OLDER, AND MAYBE IN NEED OF PAINTING, BUT IT WAS STILL THE SAME. IT WAS STILL HOME POP OPENED THE DOOR AND I STEPPED INSIDE SPIRAL STREAMERS OF CREPE PAPER DECORATED THE LIVING ROOM IN MY HONOR

WELCOME HOME, EMILE!

LET'S HAVE A DRINK!

WAIT STAN. LOOK I APPRECIATE ALL THIS! REALLY! BUT I'M INTERESTED IN THE VAMPIRE! WHAT ABOUT IT...

IT'S HORRIBLE HORRIBLE! EMILE IF YOU ONLY KNEW HOW...

POP! WE AGREED TO FORGET ABOUT THE VAMPIRE TONIGHT! WE AGREED THAT WE'D MAKE EMILE'S HOME-COMING A HAPPY ONE...

HOW CAN I BE HAPPY, STAN, WHEN TWELVE OF MY TOWNSFOLK ARE DEAD?

ALL NIGHT ALL RIGHT IT ALL STARTED WHEN OLD MAN FEENEY WAS FOUND DEAD TWO TINY HOLES IN HIS NECK, AND HIS BLOOD DRAINED FROM HIS BODY THEN, ED COBB WAS NEXT AND SO ON THE WHOLE TOWN'S SCARED STIFF NO ONE GOES OUT AT NIGHT EXCEPT ME AND THE OTHER BOYS ON THE NIGHT SHIFT AT THE PLANT

HASN'T ANYONE FOUND THE VAMPIRE? DON'T YOU TRY TO TRAP IT... DRIVE A STAKE THROUGH ITS HEART?

NO ONE SEES IT NO ONE KNOWS WHERE IT SLEEPS. BELIEVE ME, WE'VE TRIED TO FIND ITS RESTING PLACE BUT IT'S BEEN NO USE ME AND THE BOYS EVEN TOOK A NIGHT OFF FROM THE PLANT AND WANDERED AROUND TOWN TRY TO CATCH SIGHT OF IT

IT'S ALMOST TEN-THIRTY STANLEY HADN'T YOU BETTER BE RUNNING ALONG?

STANLEY GLANCED AT HIS WATCH...

SORRY, EMILE. TIME TO GO TO *WORK* I'LL SEE YOU IN THE MORNING

I DON'T *KNOW* STAN. I'M PRETTY *TIRED* I'LL PROBABLY STILL BE *ASLEEP* WHEN YOU GET HOME

HE SMILED...

OKAY, KID WHEN I *GET UP*, THEN S'LONG, NEW IT IT'S *GOOD* TO HAVE YOU *HOME* AGAIN, EMILE...

IT'S GOOD TO *BE* HOME STAN

HE WAS GONE STAN, MY BROTHER FOR THREE YEARS HE'D DONE THIS FOR ME ..WORKED TO HELP PUT ME THROUGH COLLEGE. SAD TURNED TO ME

YOU *MUST* BE TIRED AFTER THAT *LONG TRIP*, EMILE! *COME* YOUR *ROOM* IS READY...

THANKS POP! I'M BEAT

POP WATCHED ME UNDRESS AND CRAWL INTO MY OLD BED THEN HE SNAPPED OFF THE LIGHT I THINK I WAS ASLEEP AS SOON AS MY HEAD HIT THE PILLOW THE NEXT THING I REMEMBER WAS POP'S GOD AWFUL SCREAMING WAKING ME UP

NUH? *WHAT THE... POP! POP!*

I RUSHED TO POP'S ROOM THE DOOR WAS LOCKED FROM THE INSIDE BY THE TIME I'D BROKEN IT OPEN, HIS SCREAMS HAD STOPPED I SNAPPED ON THE LIGHT POP LAY ON HIS BED, DEATHLY WHITE *THERE WERE TWO SMALL PUNCTURE HOLES IN HIS NECK*

POP! MY GOD! POP!

HE WAS DEAD... I DON'T REMEMBER TOO CLEARLY WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT BETWEEN FITS OF CRYING, I THINK I MADE A PHONE CALL ANYWAY, THE NEXT THING I KNEW STAN WAS HOME AND HE WAS COMFORTING ME AND I WAS SHRIEKING HYSTERICALLY...

I'LL GET IT STAN! I SWEAR I'LL GET THAT VAMPIRE!

TAKE IT *EASY*, EMILE WE *ALL* WANT TO PING IT THE *WHOLE TOWN* WANTS TO. *WE'LL* GET IT FOR POP! *YOU AND ME*

THE HOUSE WAS FULL OF PEOPLE...NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS I GUESS AFTER A WHILE I CALMED DOWN STAN MADE A PHONE CALL, AND MR BOBIN THE TOWN UNDERTAKER, CAME AND TOOK POP AWAY IT WAS ABOUT FIVE IN THE MORNING WHEN EVERYBODY'D LEFT...

YOU YOU MUST BE TIRED, STAN! WHY DON'T YOU GET SOME REST?

I WILL, EMILE SOME FEELING BETTER?

I NODDED. MY EYES FELL ON MY STILL-UNPACKED SUITCASES SUDDENLY I KNEW I KNEW HOW TO TRAP OUR VAMPIRE I UNPACKED THE SUITCASE WITH MY EQUIPMENT THE EQUIPMENT I'D BOUGHT IN COLLEGE

STAN LOOK DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS?

UH-UH! NO! WHAT IS IT?

IT'S A GEIGER COUNTER, STAN IT DETECTS RADIO-ACTIVE MATERIAL IT CLICKS WHEN IT HEARS ANY THIS IS THE WAY YOU TURN IT ON SEE? NOW... LISTEN...

I SNAPPED ON THE GEIGER COUNTER IT BEGAN TO CLICK LOUDLY...

WHY... IT'S CLICKING NOW EMILE!

YES STAN! BECAUSE IT'S DETECTING A RADIO-ACTIVE MATERIAL. THIS... IN THIS BOTTLE IS RADIO PHOSPHOROUS ISOTOPE P-32 ...A RADIO-ACTIVE TRACER THE GEIGER COUNTER SENSES THE P-32 THAT'S WHY IT'S CLICKING!

WELL, WHAT'S THIS GOT TO DO WITH THE VAMPIRE EMILE?

I CAN'T TELL YOU STAN JUST TRUST ME AND DON'T WORRY AFTER TONIGHT THIS TOWN WILL BE RID OF HIM YOU'LL SEE NOW WHY AND I'LL YOU GET SOME SLEEP YOU MUST BE TIRED

I AM TIRED EMILE I THINK I WILL HIT THE HAY

STAN WENT INTO HIS ROOM AND SHUT THE DOOR SOON, IT WAS QUIET AND I KNEW HE WAS ASLEEP. FOR A LONG TIME I SAT THERE, WATCHING IT GET LIGHT AND FEELING THE SUN STREAMING IN THE WINDOW THEN I TOOK A PENCIL AND BEGAN TO WRITE

DEAR STANLEY

WHEN YOU AWAKEN, I WILL BE GONE AND I LOOK FOR ME TOMORROW MORNING, TAKE THE GEIGER COUNTER, COME THE TOWN, AND LISTEN FOR THE CLICKS... WHEN YOU HEAR THEM, YOU WILL HAVE FOUND THE VAMPIRE'S RESTING PLACE

MY PLAN WAS SIMPLE. I FINISHED THE NOTE...

...I HAVE SWALLOWED THE ISOTOPE, P-32. IT WILL BE IN MY BLOODSTREAM WHEN THE VAMPIRE ATTACKS ME. WHEN HE RETURNS TO HIS RESTING PLACE, IT WILL BE IN HIS BLOODSTREAM IT IS THE ONLY WAY I HAVE SACRIFICED MYSELF FOR POP WHEN YOU DRIVE THE STAKE... GIVE ONE RAP FOR ME!

EMILE

I PROPPED THE NOTE UP BESIDE THE GEIGER-COUNTER AND TOOK THE BOTTLE OF RADIO PHOSPHORUS...

THEN I LEFT THE HOUSE. I WENT OUT INTO THE SUNSHINE. I WENT OUT INTO MY TOWN. I WALKED THE STREETS AND I LOOKED AT THE PEOPLE AND I SAW THE FEAR IN THEIR EYES AND MOURNED MY FATHER AND KNEW THAT WHAT I WAS GOING TO DO WAS RIGHT...

I WATCHED THE SUN SET BEYOND THE DISTANT MOUNTAINS. I WATCHED THE SKY DARKEN AND THE STARS BING OUT... FIRST ONE GOLD, THEN A WHOLE SYMPHONY OF TWINKLING LIGHT. I LIFTED THE BOTTLE OF P-32 TO MY LIPS...

NOW I LISTEN TO THE QUICK HEAVY FOOTSTEPS DENING NS, ALMOST ON TOP OF ME. MY HANDS ARE COLD AND MY BLOOD POUNDS THROUGH MY SHIVERING BODY. BUT I AM NOT AFRAID...

I AM NOT AFRAID BECAUSE I KNOW THAT ETANLEY HAS AWAKENED AND IS READING MY NOTE...

ENILE! YOU LITTLE FOOL!

AND I KNOW THET HE WILL SEARCH FOR MY SUNT AND FIND IT AND THE GEIGER-COUNTER WILL BE SILENT BECAUSE THE VAMPIRE WILL HAVE DRAINED THE RADIO-ACTIVE TRACER OUT OF MY BODY WITH MY BLOOD...

ENILE... EOO... ENILE...

AND THEN ETANLEY WILL GO LOOKING. AND HE WILL LISTEN. HE WILL PEER INTO CELLARS AND ATTICS AND OLD BUILDINGS AND DESERTED HOUSES...

I'LL FIND YOU! I'LL FIND YOU!

HE WILL LOOK IN EMPTY LOTS AND OLD WELLS AND CAVES LONG FORGOTTEN...
...AND HE WILL LISTEN. HE WILL LISTEN FOR THE CLICKS... THE CLICKS THAT WILL TELL HIM THAT HE IS NEARING THE VAMPIRE'S REST-HIS PLACE...
AND THE CLICKS WILL GROW LOUDER AND LOUDER AND LOUDER UNTIL STANLEY WILL STAND AND LOOK DOWN AT THE INHUMAN LIVING-DEAD WITH A HATE IN HIS EYES AND A CURSE ON HIS LIPS...
AND HE WILL LIFT THE ROUGHLY HEWN WOODEN STAKE AND PLACE IT ON THE VAMPIRE'S CHEST AND RAISE THE ROCK
...AND DRIVE THE STAKE THROUGH THE BLOOD-SUCKING THING'S INHUMAN HEART...
FOR POP... UGH ...AND... CHARLE... UGH... AND THE OTHERS...
...UNTIL IT SHRIVELS AND FALLS TO DUST AND IS DESTROYED

I STOP. I STOP WALKING. THE FOOTSTEPS BEHIND ME STOP TOO. I CLENCH MY FISTS AND GRIT MY TEETH AND WAIT. SUDDENLY, I AM SHIVERING NO LONGER. SUDDENLY MY HANDS ARE WARM. SUDDENLY I AM READY. I TURN SMILING...
...AND MY SMILE FREEZES AND MY FACE IS A WAX MASK...
YOU!

STANLEY, MY BROTHER, LEERS AT ME HIS FANGS GLEAMING
STANLEY! MY GOD!
AND THEN HE IS UPON ME THROWING ME TO THE GROUND. I FEEL THE FLESH OF MY THROAT TEAR AS HIS NEEDLE-LIKE FANGS RIP IN...
I FEEL HIS OVERPOWERING STRENGTH AS HE HOLDS ME FAST. I FEEL A WARM TRICKLE DOWN NEHING MY NECK WHERE THE BLOOD IS RUNNING
THE STARS ABOVE BEGIN TO SPIN UNTIL THEY WHIRL IN CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF LIGHT AND I FEEL MY STRENGTH EBBING AND KNOW THAT I AM DYING...
JUST BEFORE THE BLACKNESS CLOSES IN, I THING OF STANLEY EGING HOME AND TURNING ON THE GEIGER COUNTER...
AND LISTENING TO THE CLICKS AND TEARING UP MY NOTE AND LAUGHING
NEE, NEE—WHICH IS JUST WHAT I'M DOING, EMILE. WELL, AS THEY ALWAYS SAY, THE BEST LAID PLANS OF MICE AND CHEMISTS OFT GO BOOM SOMEBODY WAS MADE A SUCKER OF, ENT SO STANLEY WAS THE VAMP ALL ALONG, OH... BROTHER. NO WONDER HE WORKED NIGHTS AND SLEPT DAYS—ALL VAMPIRES DO! WHAT? YOU KNOW SOMEBODY WHO WORKS NIGHTS AND SLEEPS DATS AND HE'S NO VAMPIRE? ARE YOU... NEE, NEE. SURE? TRY LOOKING FOR A THIN LATER OF SOIL IN HIS GER. NOW... V K THIS WAY...

THE VAULT OF HORROR!®

HEH, HEH! AND NOW... NOW THAT YOUR *STOMACHS* HAVE BEEN *DULY UPSET* BY *C.W.'S CRUD-COOKING*, IT'S *MY* TURN TO *FEED YOU FEAR*! THIS IS YOUR *HOST* IN THE *VAULT OF HORROR*, *THE VAULT-KEEPER*, READY TO DIP DOWN INTO MY COLLECTION OF *CREEPY CONTRIVANCES* AND SPIN ANOTHER *SCREAM STORY* FOR YOUR PLEASURE. I *CALL* THIS *YELP YARN*...

LOVER, COME BACK TO ME!

THE CAR ENGINE COUGHED AND DIED AND THE NERVOUS STACCATO SOUND OF THE DOWNPOUR ON THE ROOF SEEMED TO INCREASE IN TEMPO. CHARLES KEELEY LEANED FORWARD, PEERING PAST THE FOGGING WINDSHIELD INTO THE FLUID BLACKNESS ILLUMINATED BY THE HEADLIGHTS. BESIDE HIM, PEGGY, HIS BRIDE OF SCARCELY TWO HOURS, GIGGLED.

THIS ISN'T *FUNNY*, PEG! SHE'S CONKED OUT FOR *GOOD*! *WHAT* A *WAY* TO *SPEND* A *HONEYMOON*!

OH, DARLING! I'M *SO HAPPY* EVEN BEING *BOGGED DOWN* ON A *LONELY BACKWOODS ROAD* IS *FUN*! AS LONG AS IT'S WITH *YOU*.

CHARLIE TURNED TO HIS LOVELY NEW WIFE. SHE BRIMMED AT HIM AND THE LOVE AND HAPPINESS THAT WAS INSIDE HER SPARKLED OUT WARD THROUGH HER SMILING EYES...

YES, BUT... WELL... SPENDING ONE'S *WEDDING NIGHT* STUCK IN A *CAR* ISN'T *MY* IDEA OF *FUN*, PEG

CHARLIE, DEAR TWO HOURS AGO I WAS *PEGGY ANDERSON* LIVING WITH AN *OLD MAID AUNT* AN *ORPHAN* WHO GREW UP KNOWING *NO LOVE*

ALAN ANDERSON, MY *FATHER* WAS *KILLED* BEFORE I WAS *BORN* AUNTY NEVER *TOLD* ME *WHY* OR *HOW*, ALTHOUGH I *QUESTIONED* HER SO MANY TIMES *ABOUT* IT SOMETIMES I THINK SHE WAS TRYING TO *HIDE* SOMETHING ABOUT MY FATHER'S DEATH SOME TERRIBLE *MYSTERY!*

AND MY MOTHER *FRENA DIED* GIVING *BIRTH* TO *ME*. YOU MET *AUNTY*. YOU *KNOW* WHAT A *FRIGID* OLD WOMAN SHE *IS*. SHE BROUGHT ME *UP*, CHARLIE. SHE *NEVER* GAVE ME ANY *AFFECTION* BECAUSE I *DOUBT* IF THERE WAS AN *OUNCE* OF AFFECTION *IN* HER TO *GIVE*. THEN, DEAREST, *YOU* CAME ALONG .. AND I KNEW WHAT IT WAS TO *LOVE* SOMEONE, AND *WANT* SOMEONE, AND FOR SOMEONE TO LOVE AND WANT *ME* SO.

PEGGY SNUGGLED UP CLOSE TO HER NEW HUSBAND...

SO YOU *SEE*, DARLING? WHETHER IT'S IN A *PALACE* OR A *BOGGED-DOWN CAR* ON A *DESERTED MUDDY ROAD*, AS LONG AS I CAN BE *CLOSE* TO YOU... AND *KNOW LOVE*

PEGGY

THERE WAS A FLASH OF LIGHTNING, AND A THUNDER CLAP ROARED. CHARLIE REACHED OVER AND SNAPPED OFF THE HEADLIGHTS, AND THE DARKNESS CLOSED IN AROUND THEM. HE COULD HEAR PEGGY'S HEAVY BREATHING ABOVE THE DOWNPOUR AS HE SLID HIS ARMS AROUND HER AND DREW HER TO HIM.

WAIT, CHARLIE! *LOOK!*

WHAT? WHERE?

PEGGY POINTED OFF TO THE LEFT INTO THE DOWNPOURING BLACKNESS.

WAIT UNTIL ANOTHER *LIGHTNING FLASH* SILHOUETTES IT *THERE! SEE?*

IT'S A *HOUSE!* AN *OLD MANSION!*

PEGGY FLUNG OPEN THE CAR DOOR. THE RAIN LASHED IN AT THEM...

COME ON, DARLING. EVEN IF IT'S *DESERTED*, IT'LL BE *LESS CRAMPED* THAN THE *CAR*. LET'S *RUN FOR IT*

OKAY! I'LL BET THE *OVERHIGHT BAG*

THEY RAN ..HAND IN HAND...THROUGH THE COLD WHITE LIGHTNING FLASHES AND THE EAR SPLITTING THUNDER ROLLS... THROUGH THE CASCADING SHEETS OF RAIN AND SPLASHING MUD...UNTIL THEY CLIMBED, PANTING AND BREATHLESS, ONTO THE PORCH OF THE OLD HOUSE...

WHEW. I'M *SOAKED* TO THE *SKIN*.

ME TOO. LOOKS LIKE THIS PLACE IS *DESERTED*. THE *WINDOWS* ARE *ALL BOARDED UP* AND ...THE *DOOR'S LOCKED*..

BEHIND THEM, THE RAIN SWEPT OFF THE PORCH ROOF AND WATERFALLED TO THE GROUND, FEEDING GROWING RIVULETS THAT RAN CRAZILY OFF INTO THE BLACKNESS DOWN THE HILL. CHARLIE SHRUGGED...

WELL...IT'S EITHER BACK TO THE *CAR* FOR US AN *BREAK IN*

I'M SURE WHOEVER *OWNS* THE HOUSE WOULDN'T *MIND* UNDER THE *CIRCUMSTANCES*..

THE AGED LOCK, ROTTED WITH THE YEARS, SPLINTERED OPEN UNDER CHARLES'S WEIGHT, AND THE DOOR SWUNG WIDE...

WELL, MRS. KEELEY! WELCOME TO OUR *HONEYMOON COTTAGE*.

OH, CHARLIE...

PEGGY LAUGHED HAPPILY AS CHARLES LIFTED HER IN HIS STRONG ARMS AND CARRIED HER ACROSS THE THRESHOLD...

IT'S THE *CUSTOM*, YOU KNOW, PEGGY.

DARLING.

CHARLES KICKED THE DOOR SHUT BEHIND HIM, SLAMMING OUT THE NOISE OF THE STORM. IN THE GLOOM, WHITE HULKS SAT SILENTLY, COVERED WITH THE DUST OF YEARS OF ABANDONMENT...

WELL, WHAT DO YOU KNOW! *FURNITURE* LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE *MOVED OUT* AND *LEFT* EVERYTHING *EXACTLY AS IS*..

THEN, THEN THERE MUST BE A *BEDROOM*...AND A... *BED*...

CHARLES FOUND CANDLES IN A HOLDER UNDER ONE OF THE DUST COVERINGS AND LIT THEM, AND THEY BEGAN TO EXPLORE THE DESERTED OLD MANSION. A MASSIVE WINDING STAIRCASE LED FROM THE MAIN FLOOR UPWARD. UPSTAIRS, THEY FOUND

A *BEDROOM* WITH A *FIREPLACE*...AND *LOOK*... GAY! LOOK AT THAT *BATTLE-AXE* OVER THE MANTLE...

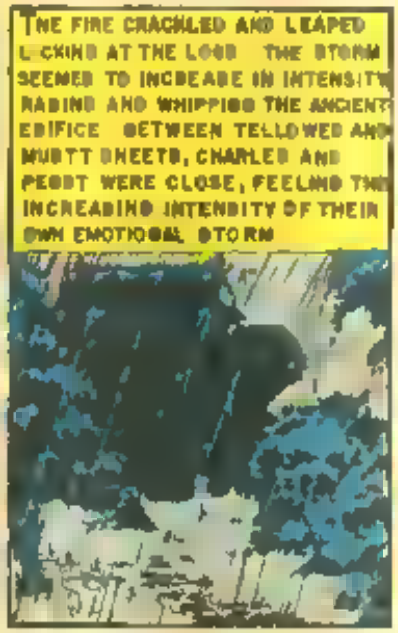
START A *FIRE* DEAR, WHILE I UNCOVER THIS BED...

SOON, A ROARING FIRE WAS FILLING THE DUSTY OLD BEDROOM WITH ITS WARMTH. BEFORE IT, A MAKESHIFT CLOTHESLINE HELD DRIPPING CLOTHES. THE HUGE BED HAD BEEN CLEARED OF ITS DUST-COVER AND LAY WITH ITS BLANKET THROWN BACK INVITINGLY. THE OVERNIGHT BAG SAT OPEN UPON A CHAIR. CHARLES AND PEGGY STOOD WATCHING THE FLAMES...

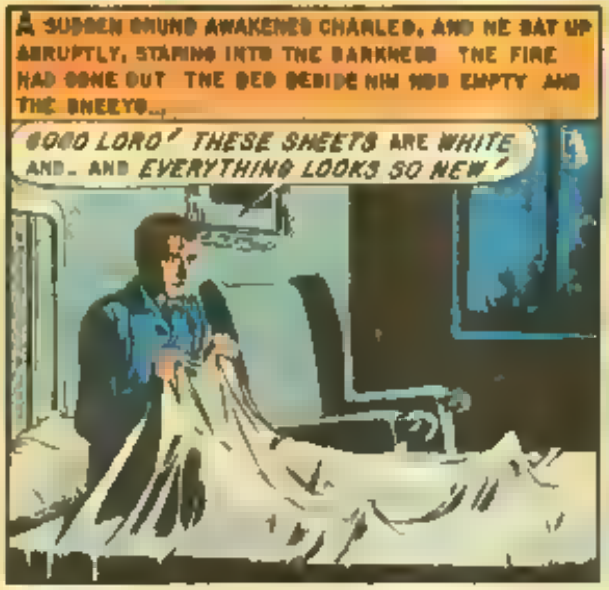
READY TO HIT THE HAY NOW?

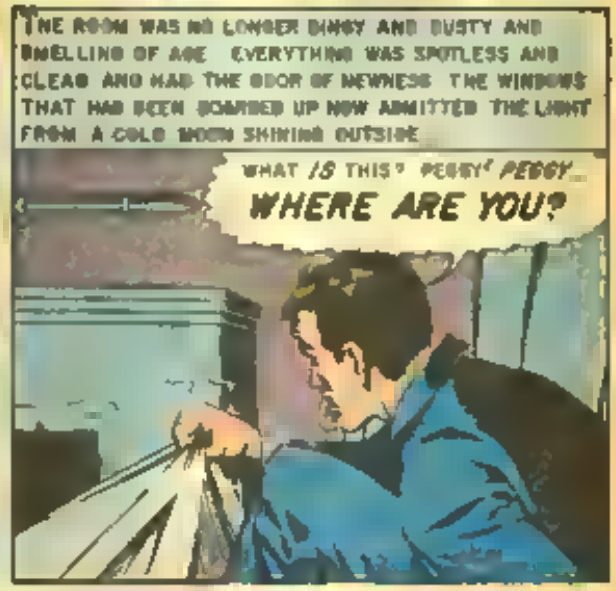
MMMM

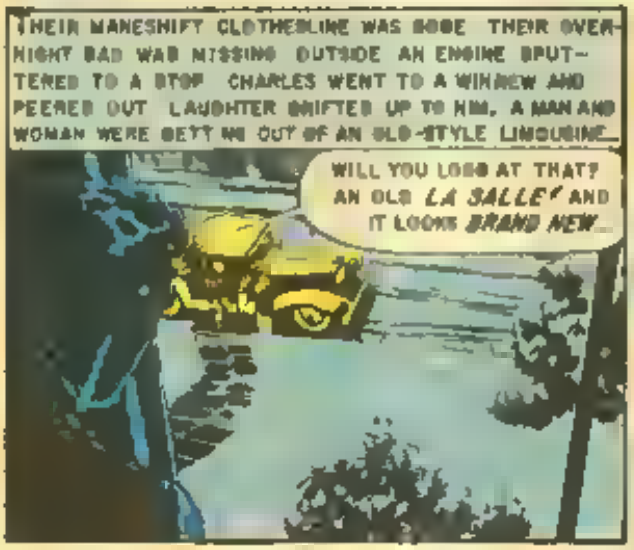
OUTSIDE, THE STORM LASHED AT THE OLD HOUSE. BUT WITHIN, THE NEWLY-WEDS WERE OBLIVIOUS TO ITS FURY, HEARING ONLY THE POUNDING OF THEIR OWN HEARTS AS THEY WALKED TOGETHER TO THE NUDE BED...

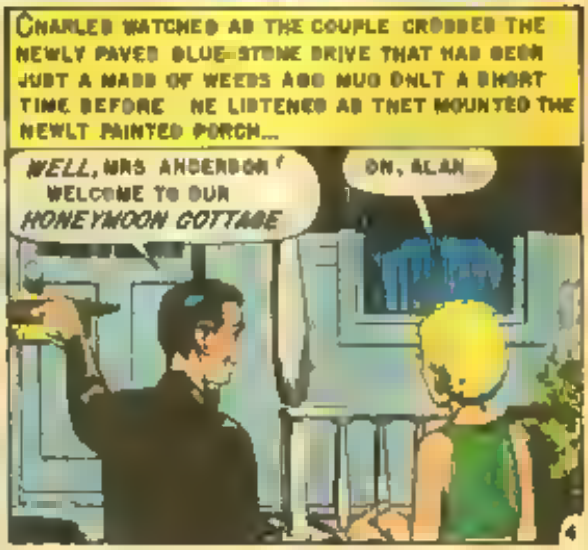

THE FIRE CRACKLED AND LEAPED LICKING AT THE LOGS. THE STORM SEEMED TO INCREASE IN INTENSITY RAGING AND WHIPPING THE ANCIENT EDIFICE. BETWEEN TELLOWED AND MUSTY SHEETS, CHARLES AND PEGGY WERE CLOSE, FEELING THE INCREASING INTENSITY OF THEIR OWN EMOTIONAL STORM.

AND THEN, THE STORMS FADED, SPENDING THEMSELVES. THE FIRE COOLED. SLEEP AND PEACE DESCENDED...


A SUDDEN SOUND AWAKENED CHARLES, AND HE SAT UP ABRUPTLY, STARING INTO THE DARKNESS. THE FIRE HAD GONE OUT. THE BED BESIDE HIM WAS EMPTY. AND THE SHEETS...
GOOD LORD! THESE SHEETS ARE WHITE AND... AND EVERYTHING LOOKS SO NEW!


THE ROOM WAS NO LONGER DINGY AND DUSTY AND SMELLING OF AGE. EVERYTHING WAS SPOTLESS AND CLEAN AND HAD THE ODOR OF NEWNESS. THE WINDOWS THAT HAD BEEN BOARDED UP NOW ADMITTED THE LIGHT FROM A COLD MOON SHINING OUTSIDE.
WHAT IS THIS? PEGGY! PEGGY... WHERE ARE YOU?


THEIR MAKESHIFT CLOTHESLINE WAS GONE. THEIR OVERNIGHT BAG WAS MISSING. OUTSIDE, AN ENGINE SPUTTERED TO A STOP. CHARLES WENT TO A WINDOW AND PEERED OUT. LAUGHTER DRIFTED UP TO HIM. A MAN AND WOMAN WERE GETTING OUT OF AN OLD-STYLE LIMOUSINE...
WILL YOU LOOK AT THAT? AN OLD LA SALLE! AND IT LOOKS BRAND NEW...


CHARLES WATCHED AS THE COUPLE CROSSED THE NEWLY PAVED BLUE-STONE DRIVE THAT HAD BEEN JUST A MASS OF WEEDS AND MUD ONLY A SHORT TIME BEFORE. HE LISTENED AS THEY MOUNTED THE NEWLY PAINTED PORCH...
WELL, MRS ANDERSON! WELCOME TO OUR HONEYMOON COTTAGE.
OH, ALAN...

ANDERSON! ALAN ANDERSON. WHY DID THAT NAME SOUND FAMILIAR? DOWNSTAIRS A KEY RATTLED IN THE LOCK AND A DOOR SWUNG OPEN. CHARLES CROSSED THE BEDROOM AND WENT TO THE HEAD OF THE STAIRS...
IT'S THE CUSTOM, YOU KNOW FREDA
DARLING
CHARLES GASPED. FREDA?! WHY... THAT WAS PEGGY! DOWN THERE BEING CARRIED ACROSS THE THRESHOLD! OR WAS IT PEGGY? IT.. IT LOOKED LIKE PEGGY!...
WELL, DARLING! THIS IS YOUR NEW HOME LIKE IT?
FREDA AND ALAN ANDERSON! OF COURSE!
DOWN BELOW, AS UPSTAIRS, EVERYTHING WAS SHINY AND NEW. THE DUST-COVERS THAT HAD HIDDEN THE FURNITURE WERE GONE...
OH, ALAN... IT'S BEAUTIFUL!
FREDA AND ALAN ANDERSON WERE PEGGY'S PARENTS!
CHARLES DUCKED INTO THE BEDROOM AS THEY CAME UP THE STAIRS. HE HELD HIS BREATH, COWERING BEHIND THE DOOR AS THEY ENTERED..
THEIR CLOTHES.. THEY'RE THE STYLES OF THE TWENTIES! AND THE OLD-FASHIONED CAR... THE NEW FURNITURE! WHY I'M WITNESSING WHAT HAPPENED TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO IN THIS VERY HOUSE
START A FIRE, DEAR
CHARLES WATCHED, FASCINATED, AS THE MAN LIT A FIRE IN THE NEW FIREPLACE AND THE WOMAN BEGAN TO UNDRESS. HE DARED NOT MOVE FROM HIS HIDING PLACE BEHIND THE BEDROOM DOOR FOR FEAR OF BEING SEEN...
I'M WITNESSING PEGGY'S MOTHER AND FATHER'S WEDDING NIGHT...
OH, ALAN. I'M SO DELIRIOUSLY HAPPY
THE COUPLE MOVED, ARM AND ARM, TO THE BED THAT CHARLES HAD AWAKENED IN. HE TURNED AWAY LISTENING TO THEIR HEAVY BREATHING, THEIR SOFT VOICES WHISPERING...
WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT? WHY AM I SEEING ALL THIS? WHAT'S THE REASON?...
EMBARRASSED BY THE INTIMACY OF THE SCENE BEYOND, CHARLES WAITED, STARING AT THE BLANK DOOR, UNTIL THEIR SOFT WHISPERS FADED AND THEIR GASPS AND SIGHS TURNED TO THE REGULAR BREATHING OF SLUMBER...
THEY'RE ASLEEP! NOW HOW IN BLAZES DO I GET BACK TO 1953 TO PEGGY?

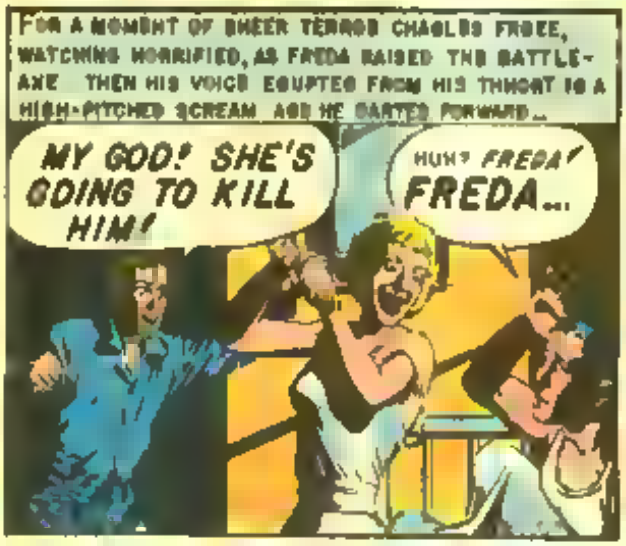
CHARLES WAS ABOUT TO STEP FROM HIS HIDING PLACE AND TIP-TOE DOWNSTAIRS WHEN SLIDING FOOTSTEPS APPROACHED
OH OH! IT'S FREDA...PEGGY'S MOTHER SHE'S COMING THIS WAY!

FREDA'S FACE WAS A GRINNING MASK WITH GLAZED STARING EYES AS SHE SEEMED TO FLOAT ACROSS THE BEDROOM TOWARD THE FIREPLACE.
SHE'S REACHING FOR THAT BATTLE AXE OVER THE MANTEL...

GRIPPING THE LETHAL LOOKING WEAPON IN HER TINY WHITE KNUCKLED FISTS FREDA RETURNED TO THE BED WHERE ALAN LAY SLEEPING PEACEFULLY SHE STOOD OVER HIM...HER EYES FILLING WITH TEARS.
OH, ALAN! ALAN! THIS NIGHT IS SO BEAUTIFUL THIS LOVE OF OURS SO COMPLETE

CHARLES LISTENED, ROOTED TO HIS HIDING PLACE, AS FREDA'S SOFT QUIVERING VOICE DRIFTED ACROSS THE ROOM...
THIS IS THE WAY LOVE SHOULD ALWAYS REMAIN MY DARLING. SWEET AND CLEAN AND PASSIONATE BUT IT DOESN'T. TIME SOURS LOVE AND DIRTIES IT THE PASSION COOLS

HER WORDS WERE ALMOST SING-SONG NOW ALMOST RAVING
BUT THAT ISN'T GOING TO HAPPEN TO OUR SWEET CLEAN PASSIONATE LOVE, MY REAREST I'M NOT GOING TO LET IT I'M GOING TO KEEP IT EXACTLY AS IT IS PRESERVE IT FOR ALWAYS! I'M GOING TO MAKE SURE TIME DOESN'T SPOIL OUR LOVE! ALAN! ALAN.. WAKE UP, DARLING!
GOOD LORD! SHE'S SHE'S


FOR A MOMENT OF SHEER TERROR CHARLES FROZE, WATCHING HORRIFIED, AS FREDA RAISED THE BATTLE-AXE THEN HIS VOICE ERUPTED FROM HIS THROAT IN A HIGH-PITCHED SCREAM AND HE DARTED FORWARD...
MY GOD! SHE'S GOING TO KILL HIM!
HUH? FREDA! FREDA...

CHARLES LUNGES FORWARD TRYING TO CATCH FREDA'S ARMS, BUT HIS FINGERS CLOSED ON NOTHINGNESS. THE BATTLE-AXE FELL...
STOP! STOP... OH, LORD... I CAN'T STOP HER! I CAN'T FEEL HER SHE... SHE'S LIKE A GHOST!

ALL CHARLES COULD DO WAS TO WATCH HORRIFIED AS FREDA LIFTED THE HUGE BATTLE-AXE AGAIN AND AGAIN UNTIL THE FIGURE AS THE BED BECAME A SOFT, WET, RED MASH...

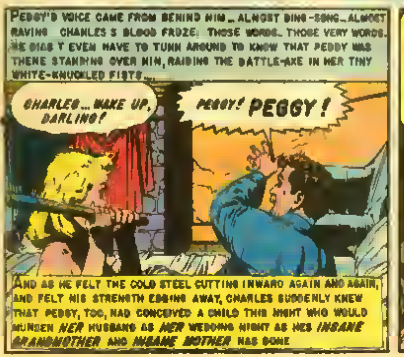
SATISFIED, FREDA TIPTOED BACK ACROSS THE ROOM AND REPLACED THE BLOODY BATTLE-AXE OVER THE FIREPLACE...

THEN SHE RETURNED TO THE BED AND CRAWLED IN BESIDE THE BLOODIED REMAINS, SMILING AND WHISPERING SOFTLY...

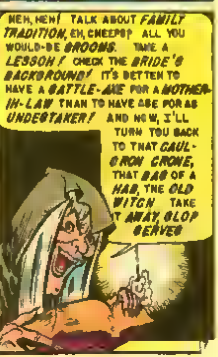
CHARLES FELT HIS STOMACH HEAVING AND STUMBLED FROM THE GORY SCENE IN THE BEDROOM. EVERYTHING BEGAN TO SPIN. HE FELT THE FLOOR GIVE WAY BENEATH HIM. SUDDENLY HE WAS LYING IN BED, STARING AT A DUSTY OLD FIRE PLACE IN A DUSTY OLD BEDROOM WITH BOARDED UP WINDOWS...

IT WAS ONLY A DREAM. EVERYTHING EXACTLY AS IT WAS... THE DUST, THE OLD FIREPLACE, THE BATTLE-AXE... GASP... THE BATTLE-AXE OVER THE FIREPLACE! IT'S GONE!

PEGGY'S VOICE CAME FROM BEHIND HIM... ALMOST SING-SONG... ALMOST RAVING CHARLES'S BLOOD FROZE. THOSE WORDS... THOSE VERY WORDS. HE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO TURN AROUND TO KNOW THAT PEGGY WAS THERE STANDING OVER HIM, RAISING THE BATTLE-AXE IN HER TINY WHITE-KNUCKLED FISTS...



AND AS HE FELT THE COLD STEEL CUTTING INWARD AGAIN AND AGAIN, AND FELT HIS STRENGTH EBBING AWAY, CHARLES SUDDENLY KNEW THAT PEGGY, TOO, HAD CONCEIVED A CHILD THIS NIGHT WHO WOULD MURDER HER HUSBAND AS HER WEDDING NIGHT AS HER INSANE GRANDMOTHER AND INSANE MOTHER HAD DONE



From the doorway in which he crouched, Bronson watched the smoke spiraling toward the sky. His eyes glittered happily with the reflection of the orange and crimson and blue tints lighting up the night: it was the best fire he had ever set!

His head turned when he heard the piercing siren announcing the arrival of the fire trucks. A smile wrinkled the corners of his mouth as he watched the long coils of hose unwinding: saw the men moving frantically forward in their billowing black-rubber coats. He pursed his lips and, in the safety of the doorway, observed critically the fire-fighting technique on display before him. The men were good, he admitted grudgingly . . . but they'd never get the flames under control before the towering building was gutted. It would take at least an hour before the last embers died amidst the charred ruins . . . an hour and he'd collect the biggest fee of his career!

He opened his silver cigarette case and removed a slim white cylinder of tobacco. For a moment he admired the gold monogram on the paper: only the top-ranking arsonist could afford his own blended cigarettes, like *this*! Meticulously he tapped the cigarette against his manicured thumbnail and turned again to watch the fire he had started.

It was that new fluid that made this job so simple. The old kerosene-rag dodge . . . that was all right for pikers and run-of-the-mill torches. And the guys who used the candle-technique . . . let them pick up their crummy $25 for a hit-or-miss job. When you get into the big-time like Bronson . . . when arson was made to pay off so well you needed a firm of accountants to handle your income tax returns . . . you did the job *right* and you did it *yourself!*

The new fluid, Bronson thought to himself, would net him a *million!* The painstaking experiments with gasoline, kerosene, sulfur and remote-controlled time-fuses was going to *really* pay off! The incendiary he had so cunningly contrived could make an almost instantaneous pyre of *concrete!*

He chuckled to himself, drawing a gold lighter from his pocket and fondling it as he watched the firemen scuttling around the base of the burning building. The ingenious way he had planted his new incendiary fluid, so that pressing a button 50 yards away generated intense heat and forced vapors to rise and fire the upper stories . . . made the job a high-speed operation and guaranteed there'd be no evidence of arson for snoopers to uncover.

Bronson placed the monogrammed cigarette in his mouth, raised the lighter and pressed the flywheel button. A yellow flame leaped out toward the cigarette, turned the tobacco orange white . . . and, in the same instant enveloped Bronson in a cocoon of fire.

A squeal of agony burst from his seared lips as he realized what had happened: those fumes generated by his incendiary liquid had clung to *him!* The first contact with flame had set him afire as if he was made of dry tinder!

He staggered out of the doorway, dimly aware of the stench of burning flesh . . . he felt the skin sloughing off his hands like dying ashes fallen from a burnt log. A second screech of agony welled up to his scorched lips as he stumbled and fell in a charred heap. The eerie echo still reverberated through the alley as the last tongues of flame flickered over his unrecognizable body.

THE OLD WITCH'S GRIM FAIRY TALE!

HEE, HEE! HERE'S ANOTHER OF MY *INFANTILE INSANITIES*, ANOTHER *CHILDISH CHILLER*, ANOTHER *NURSERY NAUSEATOR*. I CALL THIS *FOUL FABLE*...

DOUBLE-HEADER!

ONCE UPON A TIME LONG, LONG AGO THERE LIVED AN OLD KING WHO, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS SURROUNDED BY ALL THE LOVELY LADIES OF THE COURT ALL DAY LONG, WAS VERY LONELY. THE KING WAS LONELY BECAUSE, EVEN THOUGH ALL OF THE PALACE LADIES YEARNED TO BE HIS QUEEN... HE HAD NEVER MARRIED. THE KING HAD NEVER MARRIED BECAUSE HE'S NEVER FALLEN IN LOVE...

EVERY DAY THE LADIES OF THE COURT WOULD SMILE AND WINK AND TRY TO PLEASE THE LONELY OLD KING, BUT THE LONELY OLD KING WAS A RIGHTEOUS OLD CUSS, AND HE WOULDN'T FALL FOR THEIR FLIRTATIONS...

THEN, ONE DAY, WHILE THE COURT LADIES WERE EACH TRYING VERY HARD TO GAIN THE LONELY OLD KING'S ATTENTION, HE SUDDENLY SAT BOLT UPRIGHT IN HIS THRONE...

GULP!

WHAT *IS* IT, YOUR HIGHNESS?

YOUR *EYES* ARE POPPING OUT OF YOUR HEAD, YOUR HIGHNESS!

THE OLD KING GASPS...

THAT GIRL! WHO... WHO *IS* SHE?

WHAT GIRL, YOUR MAJESTY?

WHERE, YOUR MAJESTY?

OH...

THERE, AT THE FAR END OF THE COURT, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GIRL THE OLD KING HAD EVER SEEN WAS SILENTLY MOPPING THE FLOOR...

SHE, YOUR MAJESTY?

THAT... THAT *SCULLERY MAID,* SIRE?

YES! YES! HER! BRING HER HERE... TO *ME!*

THE SMILING GIRL WAS BROUGHT BEFORE THE LOVE-STRUCK KING. YES, KIDDIES, *LOVESTRUCK!* THE OLD BOY HAD FINALLY FALLEN IN LOVE. HE LOOKED HER OVER HUNGRILY... THEN...

LEAVE US ALONE!

YES, YOUR MAJESTY!

YES, YOUR MAJESTY!

THE LADIES OF THE COURT FILED OUT, LEAVING THE OLD SIND ALONE WITH THE SCULLERY MAID...

DID YOU SEE THE WAY HE *LOOKED* AT HER?

WHAT IF HE ASKS *HER* TO BE HIS *QUEEN?*

AFTER *ALL THESE YEARS,* HANGING AROUND HERE, TRYING TO *HOOK* THE OLD CROW...

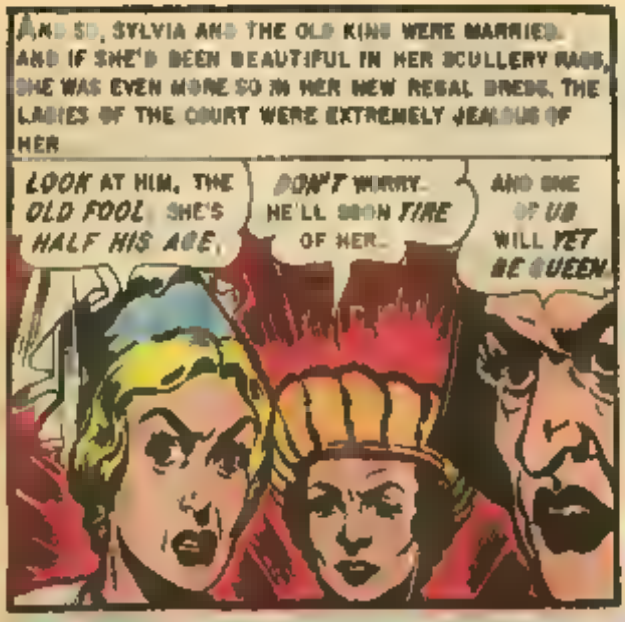
MEANWHILE, INSIDE THE THRONE ROOM...

THE MINUTE I LAID EYES ON YOU, MY DEAR, I *FELL IN LOVE WITH YOU...*

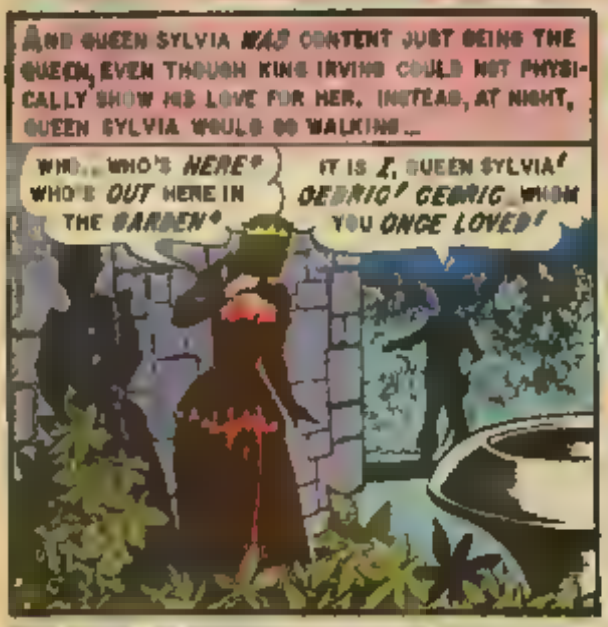
YOU *HONOR* ME, YOUR MAJESTY!

AND WHEN THE LADIES OF THE COURT WERE ALLOWED TO RETURN TO THE THRONE ROOM, THE KING ANNOUNCED...

MY SUBJECTS. THIS *LOVELY CREATURE* HAS CONSENTED TO BE MY *WIFE.* LET ME PRESENT *SYLVIA,* YOUR *QUEEN TO-BE...*


AND SO, SYLVIA AND THE OLD KING WERE MARRIED. AND IF SHE'D BEEN BEAUTIFUL IN HER SCULLERY RAGS, SHE WAS EVEN MORE SO IN HER NEW REGAL DRESS. THE LADIES OF THE COURT WERE EXTREMELY JEALOUS OF HER
LOOK AT HIM. THE OLD FOOL. SHE'S HALF HIS AGE.
DON'T WORRY. HE'LL SOON TIRE OF HER...
AND ONE OF US WILL YET BE QUEEN.

BUT THE COURT LADIES WERE WRONG. THE OLD KING DID NOT SOON TIRE OF HIS NEW YOUNG QUEEN. IN FACT, AS EACH DAY PASSED, HE FELL MORE AND MORE IN LOVE WITH HER.
OH, MY DEAR. I WISH THAT I WERE YOUNG AGAIN SO THAT I COULD MAKE YOU LOVE ME AS I LOVE YOU.
IT'S ALL RIGHT, IRVING. I AM CONTENT JUST BEING YOUR QUEEN.


AND QUEEN SYLVIA WAS CONTENT JUST BEING THE QUEEN, EVEN THOUGH KING IRVING COULD NOT PHYSICALLY SHOW HIS LOVE FOR HER. INSTEAD, AT NIGHT, QUEEN SYLVIA WOULD GO WALKING...
WHO... WHO'S HERE? WHO'S OUT HERE IN THE GARDEN?
IT IS I, QUEEN SYLVIA! CEDRIC! CEDRIC... WHOM YOU ONCE LOVED!

HE STOOD BEFORE HER...RESPLENDENT IN HIS UNIFORM. CEDRIC, CAPTAIN OF THE ROYAL GUARD. CEDRIC, WHOM, WHEN SYLVIA HAD BEEN BUT A SCULLERY MAID, SHE'D LOVED MADLY AND PASSIONATELY...
CEDRIC... PLEASE... GO AWAY! LEAVE ME ALONE! DO NOT BE CRUEL TO ME! I AM MARRIED NOW...
WHY DID YOU MARRY HIM, SYLVIA? WHY? WHY?

CEDRIC MOVED FORWARD. SYLVIA BACKED OFF...
BECAUSE HE OFFERED ME HIS KINGDOM... TO BE HIS QUEEN! WHAT GIRL COULD REFUSE?
BUT WHAT ELSE DID HE OFFER YOU? COULD HE OFFER THE LOVE A YOUNG WOMAN NEEDS?

CEDRIC CAUGHT HER HAND...
HE...HE... LOVES ME VERY MUCH, CEDRIC. HE...
BUT ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH HIS KIND OF LOVE... OR DO YOU NEED... THIS?

AND HE SWEPT HER INTO HIS STRONG ARMS...
OH, CEDRIC... DARLING...
SYLVIA...

MEANWHILE, FROM HER DARKENED BEDROOM WINDOW, ONE OF THE COURT LADIES WATCHED THE PASSIONATE SCENE IN THE MOONLIGHT...
GASP SO! THE QUEEN HAS A LOVER WAIT UNTIL YVONNE HEARS ABOUT THIS!

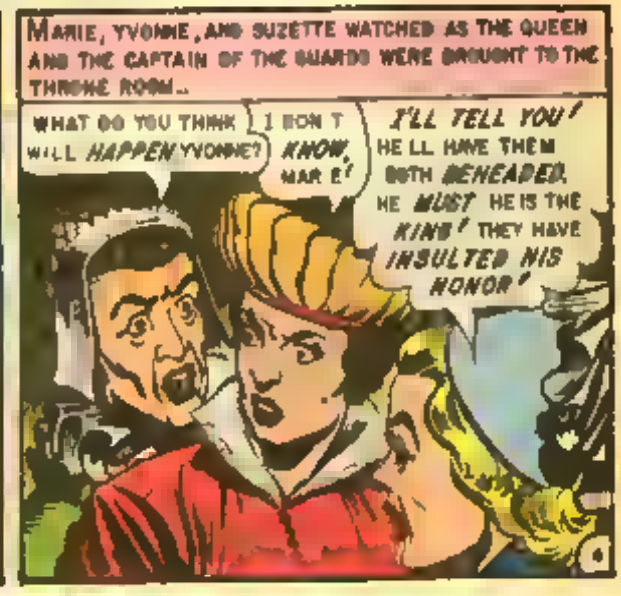
THE NEXT NIGHT, WHEN ONCE AGAIN THE QUEEN MET THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS SECRETLY, SOMEONE WAS LISTENING...
THE KING IS ASLEEP, MY SWEET...
SYLVIA.. DARLING!
GASP! IT'S TRUE. MARIE WAS RIGHT!

AND SO..
I SAW THEM, WITH MY OWN EYES, SUZETTE!
AND I HEARD THEM...
THE KING MUST KNOW THEN WE'LL BE RID OF HER. I'M GOING TO TELL HIM

SUZETTE REQUESTED AUDIENCE WITH THE KING . PRIVATELY...
ALL RIGHT, MY DEAR WHAT IS THIS URGENT NEWS YOU HAVE FOR ME?
IT CONCERNS THE QUEEN, SIRE. AND THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS IT IS A MATTER OF YOUR HONOR

THE KING LISTENED TO SUZETTE'S STORY WITH A GREAT SADNESS IN HIS HEART
MARIE SAW THEM TOGETHER IN THE GARDEN AND YVONNE HEARD THEM. AND I I HAD TO TELL YOU..
SYLVIA.. MY SYLVIA...

THE KING DISMISSED SUZETTE. HE CLOSED HIS TIRED OLD EYES. THERE WAS ONLY ONE THING TO DO. IT WAS A MATTER OF HONOR, NO MATTER HOW MUCH IT HURT..
SUMMON THE QUEEN AND THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS!
YES YOUR MAJESTY!


MARIE, YVONNE, AND SUZETTE WATCHED AS THE QUEEN AND THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS WERE BROUGHT TO THE THRONE ROOM..
WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN YVONNE?
I DON'T KNOW, MARIE!
I'LL TELL YOU! HE'LL HAVE THEM BOTH BEHEADED. HE MUST HE IS THE KING! THEY HAVE INSULTED HIS HONOR!

INSIDE THE THRONE ROOM, THE KING LOOKS AT THE YOUNG WOMAN WHOM HE LOVES SO DEARLY...

I KNOW IT ISN'T ENTIRELY YOUR FAULT, SYLVIA. I KNOW YOU COULDN'T HELP IT! I FAILED YOU IN A WAY, AND SO YOU WENT ELSEWHERE...

GASP! YOU KNOW?

YES, MY DEAR... AND THAT IS WHAT IS SO PITIFUL. IF I DIDN'T KNOW, I WOULDN'T BE FORCED TO DO WHAT I NOW MUST DO! I MUST...

SOB. SOB.

...I MUST ORDER YOUR EXECUTION! YOURS... AND HIS. TAKE THEM AWAY!

NO!

NO!

SYLVIA AND CEDRIC WERE LED AWAY. MARIE, YVONNE, AND SUZETTE WATCHED THEM GO...

ONE OF US WILL YET BE QUEEN, MY DEARS!

COME! WE MIGHT AS WELL BEGIN WORKING ON THE OLD CROW. LET'S GO IN AND COMFORT HIM!

MEANWHILE THE BROKEN HEARTED KING SAT ON HIS THRONE, THINKING...

I... I LOVE HER... I... I WOULD FORGIVE HER ANYTHING... ONLY... ONLY I CAN'T... I CAN'T BECAUSE...

THEY GLIDED IN... THE THREE LADIES. THEY CROWDED AROUND THE KING, SOOTHING HIM...

DO NOT BE UNHAPPY, YOUR MAJESTY!

IT IS BETTER THIS WAY.

GIVE ONE OF US A CHANCE TO MAKE YOU HAPPY!

THE KING LOOKED UP AT THEM... AT MARIE AND YVONNE AND SUZETTE... AND SUDDENLY HIS FACE PALED AND HIS EYES FLAMED...

YOUR MAJESTY!

GOOD LORD!

IRVING!

IN THE COURT YARD, THE AXEMAN WAS GRINDING HIS HUGE AXE, AND THE SOUND DROWNED OUT THE MUTED SCREAMS THAT CAME FROM WITHIN THE CASTLE...
EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE...
ALL OF THE LORDS AND LADIES OF THE COURT HAD GATHERED TO WITNESS THE EXECUTION ALL BUT THREE FINALLY THE KING EMERGED AND TOOK HIS PLACE BESIDE THE CHOPPING BLOCK. HE GAVE THE SIGNAL, AND SYLVIA AND CEDRIC WERE LED FORWARD.
THE AXEMAN'S BLADE ROSE AND FELL, AND THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS' HEAD DROPPED INTO THE WAITING BASKET...
THEN THE AXE ROSE GAIN AGAIN, AND WHEN IT CAME DOWN, SYLVIA, THE KING'S ONLY LOVE, LIVED NO MORE...
NOW THE KING WAS A LONELY KING ONCE MORE AS HE WALKED BACK INTO THE CASTLE, THE COURT LORDS AND LADIES SAW TEARS STREAMING FROM HIS EYES
INSIDE THE CASTLE, THE THREE LADIES OF THE COURT WHO HAD MISSED VIEWING THE EXECUTION, WRITHED ON THE STONE FLOOR OF THE THRONE ROOM MARIE COVERED HER EYES! THEY HAD BEEN PAINFULLY TORN OUT FOR WHAT SHE'D SEEN YVONNE HAD HER HANDS CLAPPED OVER HER EARS! THE KING HAD BURNED THEM OFF WITH A RED-HOT POKER FOR WHAT SHE'D HEARD AND BUZETTE CLUTCHED AT HER BLEEDING MOUTH! THE KING HAD CUT OUT HER TONGUE FOR WHAT SHE HAD SPOKEN
HEE, HEE. SEE NO EVIL, HEAR NO EVIL, SPEAK NO EVIL, EH XONIES? SO THE OLD ADAGE GOES. OLD KING IRVING, IN HIS WRATH, SURE MADE MONKEYS OUT OF THE THREE TABBLEMAKERS, EH? WELL, THAT'S MY GRIM FAIRY TALE FOR THIS ISSUE OF COURSE, AS IN ALL FAIRY TALES, EVEN GRIM ONES, EVERYBODY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER YEP, SEEMS THE KING WENT SNOOPING AND FOUND A CHAMBER MAID MAKING BEDS ON THE THIRD FLOOR AND AH, BUT THAT'S ANOTHER... EVEN GRIMMER TALE WELL, O.K. ANYTS, SO, 'BYE, NOW!

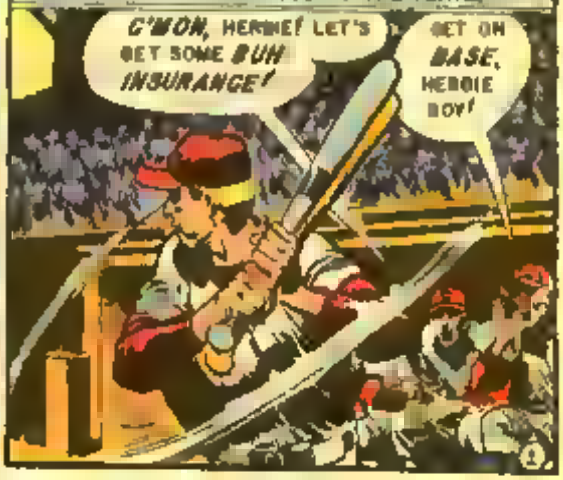
THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! AH *SPRING* IS HERE, EH, FIENDS? IT'S *BASEBALL TIME* AGAIN WELL, I'VE GOT A *BASEBALL HORROR YARN* THAT WILL DRIVE YOU *BATTY* SO CREEP INTO THE *CRYPT OF TERROR*, SETTLE DOWN ON THAT *SACK*, AND YOUR *CRYPT-KEEPER* WILL *PITCH* YOU THE *BLOOD-CURDLING, SPINE TINGLING, FEARFUL FUNGO FABLE* I CALL

FOUL PLAY!

IT IS MIDNIGHT... THE EVE OF OPENING DAY CENTRAL CITY'S BUSH-LEAGUE BALL PARK LIES IN DARKNESS THERE IS A SWELL OF FRESHLY PAINTED SEATS AND RAILS AND HOT-DOG STANDS HANGING IN THE COOL NIGHT AIR THE CHAMPIONSHIP PENNANT SAGS LIMPLY FROM THE NEW-WHITENED FLAGPOLE IN THE OUTFIELD, LIFTING SADLY NOW AND THEN TO FLAP IN THE SOFT BREEZE THAT SWEEPS IN AND ACROSS THE SILENT DESERTED GRANDSTANDS. BUT DOWN ON THE GREEN PLAYING FIELD, ILLUMINATED BY THE COLD MOONLIGHT, ARE FIGURES FIGURES IN BASEBALL UNIFORMS ; EACH IN ITS POSITION. WAITING... WAITING FOR THE WORD...

WHAT GOES ON, YOU ASK? WHY THIS MIDNIGHT GAME IN THE MOONLIT CENTRAL CITY BALL PARK? COME BACK WITH ME TO LAST SEASON TO THE FINAL GATE OF THIS BUSH-LEAGUE PENNANT RACE... TO A GRIM SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON DRY BROWNED LEAVES CHASED BY A FALL WIND THAT CARRIED A PREVIEW OF WINTER WITH ITS CHILL, TUMBLED ACROSS *BAYVILLE'S* BALL PARK AS CENTRAL CITY'S STAR PITCHER STRODE TO THE PLATE.



IT WAS THE PLAYOFF GAME BETWEEN CENTRAL CITY AND BAYVILLE. THE TWO TEAMS HAD ENDED THE SEASON TIED FOR FIRST PLACE AND THIS GAME WOULD DECIDE THE PENNANT WINNER. VISITING CENTRAL CITY WAS LEADING THEIR BAYVILLE HOSTS BY ONE PRECIOUS RUN IN THE FIRST OF THE NINTH. THERE WERE TWO OUT AS HERBIE BATTEN CAME TO BAT...
PUT IT IN HERE, BOY. DOWN THE ALLEY...
EASY OUT, BOYS...AN' WE GOT OUR POWER COMING UP LAST OF THE NINTH.
LET'S GO, HERBIE...
BAYVILLE'S HURLER WOUND UP. BIG HERBIE WATCHED AS THE PITCH CAME STEAMING IN...
LOOK OUT, HERBIE...
THE PITCH WAS WIDE, HERBIE MOVED TOWARD IT, THEN TURNED AWAY. THE BALL STRUCK HIS ELBOW...
TAKE YOUR BASE...
WHAT?! YOU'RE CRAZY! HE DID IT DELIBERATELY!
THE BAYVILLE TEAM CROWDED AROUND THE UMPIRE, PROTESTING HIS CALL...
IT NEVER WOULD'VE HIT HIM IF HE DIDN'T LEAN IN!
HE DIDN'T EVEN TRY TO GET OUT OF THE WAY!
THE UMPIRE JUST SHOOK HIS HEAD. HIS DECISION STOOD. HERBIE TROTTED DOWN TO FIRST, AND CENTRAL CITY'S LEAD-OFF MAN CAME TO THE PLATE...
OKAY, BOYS. IT'S TWO DOWN. WE'LL GET 'EM OUT!
BURN 'EM IN, PHILLY, BOY...
BAYVILLE'S PITCHER, PHIL BRADY, WOUND UP. SUDDENLY, HERBIE, ON FIRST, DID SOMETHING STRANGE FOR A BIG HULKING GUY. HE MADE A BREAK FOR SECOND BASE...
PHILLY! HE'S STEALIN'...
RIGHT HERE, PHILLY...
HERBIE... YOU CRAZY FOOL...
PHIL SPUN AROUND AND LEY GO JERRY DEEGAN, BAYVILLE'S SECOND BASEMAN AND STAR PLAYER, LEAGUE LEADER IN HITS AND HOME RUNS, WAS COVERING. THE FOG WAS WAY AHEAD OF HERBIE, BUT HERBIE CAME IN SLIDING, SPIKES HIGH
YER OUT...
JERRY! WATCH OUT...

JERRY DEEGAN WENT DOWN AS THE SPIKES SLASHED INTO HIS CALF, AND HE FELT THEIR BURNING METAL SHARPNESS. HIS TEAMMATES WERE RUNNING NOW...

JERRY! YUH HURT?

Y'OKAY, JERRY?

THAT WAS A CHEAP TRICK, SATTEN.

JERRY GOT TO HIS FEET. HE LOOKED DOWN AT HIS TORN SWEAT SOX AND THE TINY TRICKLE OF SCARLET OOZING FROM THE SPIKE-WOUND...

I'M OKAY! IT'S ONLY A SCRATCH!

SORRY, DEEGAN!

YOU DID THAT ON PURPOSE, SATTEN.

THE BIG CENTRAL CITY PITCHER SNARLED...

IT'S ALL IN THE GAME CHUM. IF I'D DEEGAN'S DROPPED THE BALL, I'D BE SAFE!

YOU WERE BEAT BY A MILE, AND YOU KNEW IT, SATTEN.

THE UMPIRES CALLED 'PLAY BALL' AND THE GAME RESUMED. CENTRAL CITY, STILL LEADING BY ONE RUN, TOOK TO THE FIELD. CENTRAL'S FIRST BASE COACH WALKED SATTEN TO THE MOUND...

I DIDN'T GIVE YOU NO STEAL SIGN, SATTEN! WHAT WAS THE IDEA?

MY IDEA, EDDIE! DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT! THE PENNANT'S AS GOOD AS OURS!

IN BAYVILLE'S DUGOUT, DOC WHITE CLEANED DEEGAN'S SPIKE WOUND AND TAPED IT...

IS HE OKAY, DOC? WILL HE BE ABLE TO BAT?

SURE! JUST A SLIGHT CUT!

OKAY, BAYVILLE. LET'S GET A BATTER OUT HERE.

NOW IT WAS THE LAST OF THE NINTH. A HOME RUN WOULD TIE THE GAME FOR BAYVILLE, AND WITH ONE ON, IT WOULD MEAN VICTORY AND THE PENNANT AND JERRY DEEGAN WAS DUE TO BAT FOURTH. THE FIRST BATTER STRODE TO THE PLATE...

GET ON, AL! JUST GET ON JERRY'LL PUT ONE INTO THE STANDS!

YEAH, BOY! I FEEL IT

BUT AL BROUNDED SADLY TO SHORT. ONE OUT. THE SECOND BATTER MOVED INTO THE BOX...

WAIT 'IM OUT, BILL! HE'S TIRIN'!

S'MATTER, JERRY!

HUM? OH NUTHIN'!

BUT BILL POPPED OUT TO RIGHT. TWO OUT. THE THIRD BATTER STEPPED INTO THE BATTER'S BOX...
C'MON, MELVIN...
LET'S TAG ONE, MEL
YOU DON'T LOOK SO GOOD, JERRY!
I'M... OKAY.
HULKING SATTEN WORKED... PUMPED... DELIVERED. MEL SWUNG AT THE FIRST PITCH LINING IT TO DEEP LEFT...
IT'S GOOD FOR TWO, MEL!
GET LEGS, MEL...
SLIDE, MEL...
THE CROWD ROARED. MEL PULLED UP AT SECOND. IN THE DUGOUT, BAYVILLE'S BOYS WERE ON THEIR FEET ALL BUT JERRY DEEGAN.
THIS IS IT! YOU'RE THROUGH, SATTEN...
LET'S GO, JERRY! HERE'S OUR CHANCE!
JERRY! YOU'RE UP!
JERRY'S EYES WERE GLASSY. BRADY SHOOK HIM...
HUH?
YOU'RE UP, JERRY!
S'MATTER, JERRY?
JERRY GOT TO HIS FEET... SLOWLY. THE DUGOUT STEPS REGLED AS HE STUMBLED UP...
I'M... I'M OKAY! JUST... FELT A LITTLE... DIZZY...
BLAST ONE INTO THE BLEACHERS, JERRY!
JERRY MOVED TO THE BAT RACK... SLOWLY — PAINFULLY. HE SQUINTED HARD, SEARCHING...
SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH HIM!
HE CAN'T EVEN FIND HIS BAT...
LET'S GO, SATTEN...
FINALLY, FINDING HIS FAVORITE WOOD, JERRY MOVED INTO THE BATTER'S BOX. HE STARED OUT AT SATTEN WHO WAS PUMPING... DELIVERING...
ST-E-E-RIKE ONE!
PLOP
AT'A BOY, HERBIE!
C'MON, JERRY...
JERRY HADN'T EVEN SEEN THE PITCH SPEED PAST HIM...

THE SECOND PITCH WAS SLOW, STRAIGHT DOWN THE MIDDLE... NEAL HOME RUN MEAT. JERRY SEEMED TO SENSE IT AND SWUNG WILDLY...
ST-EEE-RIKE TWO!
SOMETHIN'S WRONG WITH HIM, I TELL YUH! HE MISSED IT BY A MILE.
TO JERRY, IT WAS GETTING DARK. HE COULD HARDLY MAKE OUT BATTEN'S UNIFORM AS HE PUMPED THEN...
HE SLUMPED TO THE GROUND AS BATTEN'S PITCH WENT BY...
STRIKE THREE! YER OUT.
HEY!
HE'D FAINTED!
THE BALL GAME WAS OVER. CENTRAL CITY HAD WON THE CHAMPIONSHIP. DOC WHITE RUSHED TO DEEGAN'S SIDE AS THE REST OF THE BAYVILLE TEAM CROWDED AROUND.
HE... HE'S DEAD!
THE PARK WAS EMPTY NOW. BAYVILLE'S BROKEN-HEARTED FANS HAD FILED SILENTLY OUT. IN THE DRESSING ROOM, JERRY DEEGAN'S BODY LAY ON THE RUB-DOWN TABLE. DOC WHITE BENT OVER HIM...
IT MUST HAVE BEEN HIS HEART!
POOR DEEGAN!
HE WAS THE... CHOKE... THE GREATEST!
THEN, DOC WHITE'S FACE BLANCHED. HE GOT BUSY—WITH NEEDLES AND BOTTLES AND RUBBER TUBES. DEEGAN'S TEAMMATES WATCHED SILENTLY. FINALLY, THE DOC SPOKE, HIS VOICE WAS HUSKY... GRIM...
IT—IT WASN'T HIS HEART, BOYS! JERRY WAS POISONED. THIS IS... MURDER!
WHAT?
YOU SURE, DOC?
POSITIVE! HE DIED FROM A QUICK ACTING POISON WHICH, ONCE IT ENTERS YOUR BLOODSTREAM, KILLS YOU WITHIN FIFTEEN MINUTES!
BUT JERRY WAS OUT ON THE FIELD FIFTEEN MINUTES BEFORE HE DIED.
SURE! HE... HE... GOOD LORD!
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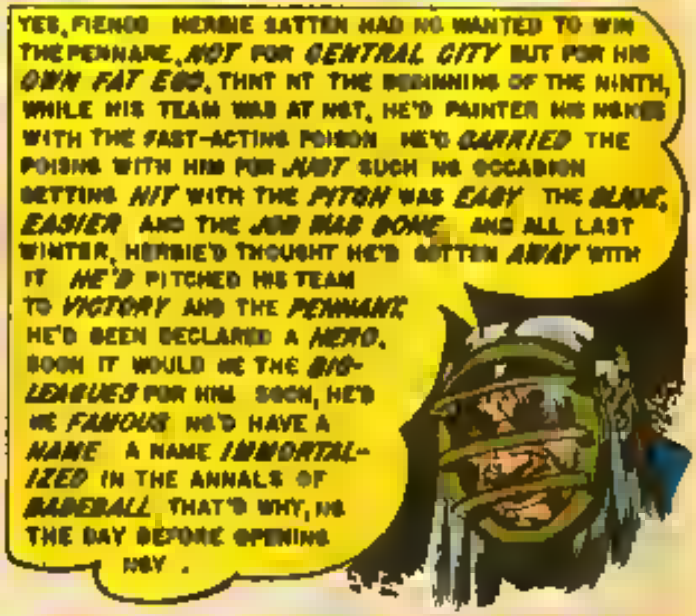
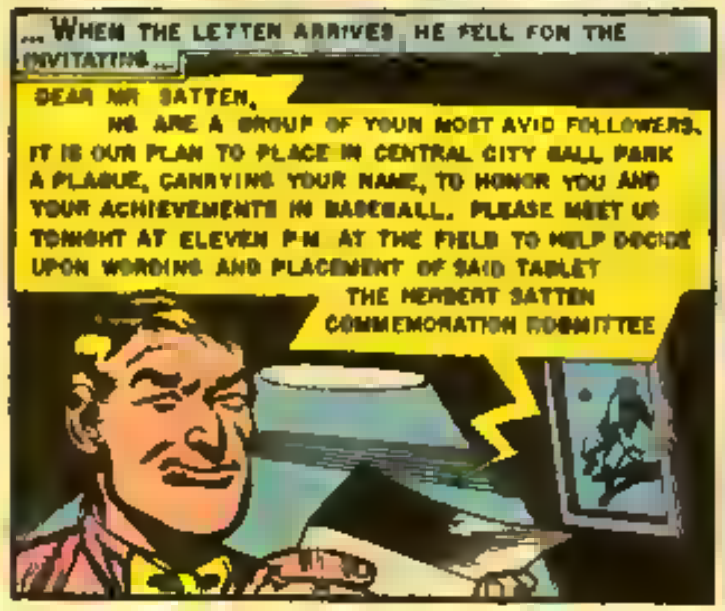
FOR A MOMENT, IT WAS SO QUIET IN THE HAYVILLE DRESSING ROOM, YOU COULD HEAR A PIN DROP. THEN...
SATTEN! HERBIE SATTEN
HE KNEW THAT IF JERRY CAME UP IN THE NINTH, IT WOULD MEAN THE GAME!
THAT CRAZY MOVE! THEY STEAL! HE HAD NO CHANCE TO MAKE IT...

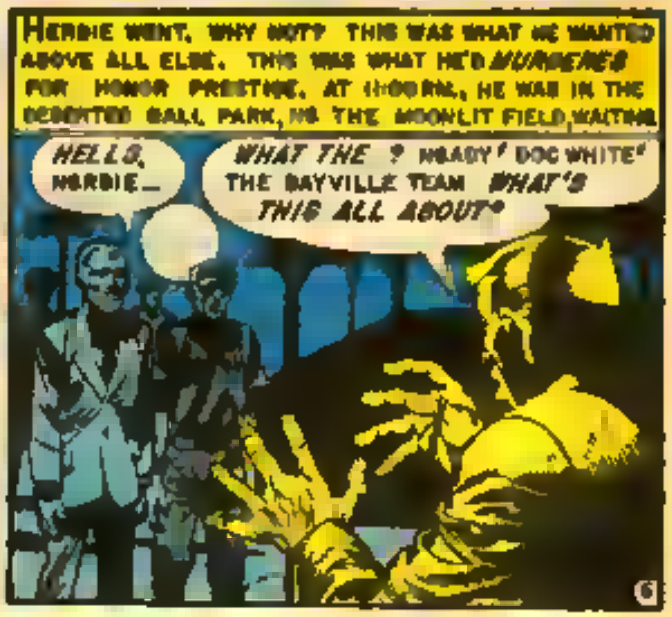
SATTEN SPIKED JERRY DELIBERATELY!
MURDERED HIM... WITH...
POISONED SPIKES!

THE VISITING TEAM LOCKER ROOM WAS DESERTED. CENTRAL CITY'S BOYS, INCLUDING SATTEN, HAD GONE. ONLY THE TRAINER WAS LEFT...EMPTYING THE LOCKERS, AND PACKING THE EQUIPMENT AWAY...
WHICH LOCKER D HERBIE SATTEN USE, MOE?
THAT ONE. HIS STUFF'S STILL IN IT...

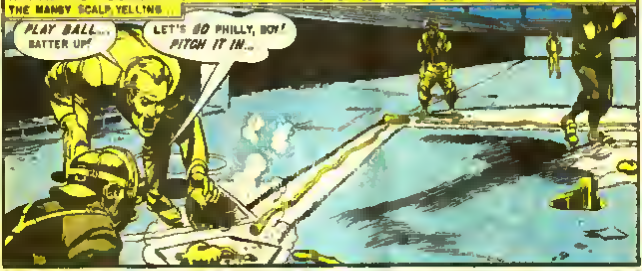
WHILE THE OTHER PLAYERS KEPT MOE, THE TRAINER, BUSY, DOC WHITE MADE A FAST CHECK OF SATTEN'S SPIKES. LATER, BACK AT THE HAYVILLE DRESSING ROOM...
THERE'S NO DOUBT ABOUT IT! SATTEN'S OUR MURDERER. TRACES OF THE POISON ARE STILL ON HIS SPIKES
THIS IS A JOB FOR THE POLICE
NO! WAIT! LET'S TAKE CARE OF HIM OURSELVES... OUR WAY...


YES, FIENDS. HERBIE SATTEN HAD SO WANTED TO WIN THE PENNANT, NOT FOR CENTRAL CITY BUT FOR HIS OWN FAT EGO. THAT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NINTH, WHILE HIS TEAM WAS AT BAT, HE'D PAINTER HIS NOSE WITH THE FAST-ACTING POISON. HE'D CARRIED THE POISON WITH HIM FOR JUST SUCH AN OCCASION. GETTING HIT WITH THE PITCH WAS EASY. THE BLUFF, EASIER. AND THE JOB WAS DONE. AND ALL LAST WINTER, HERBIE'D THOUGHT HE'D GOTTEN AWAY WITH IT. HE'D PITCHED HIS TEAM TO VICTORY AND THE PENNANT. HE'D BEEN DECLARED A HERO. SOON IT WOULD BE THE BIG-LEAGUES FOR HIM. SOON, HE'D BE FAMOUS. HE'D HAVE A NAME. A NAME IMMORTALIZED IN THE ANNALS OF BASEBALL. THAT'D WHY, ON THE DAY BEFORE OPENING DAY.


...WHEN THE LETTER ARRIVES, HE FELL FOR THE INVITATION...
DEAR MR. SATTEN,
WE ARE A GROUP OF YOUR MOST AVID FOLLOWERS. IT IS OUR PLAN TO PLACE IN CENTRAL CITY BALL PARK A PLAQUE, CARRYING YOUR NAME, TO HONOR YOU AND YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS IN BASEBALL. PLEASE MEET US TONIGHT AT ELEVEN P.M. AT THE FIELD TO HELP DECIDE UPON WORDING AND PLACEMENT OF SAID TABLET.
THE HERBERT SATTEN COMMEMORATION COMMITTEE


HERBIE WENT. WHY NOT? THIS WAS WHAT HE WANTED ABOVE ALL ELSE. THIS WAS WHAT HE'D MURDERED FOR. HONOR. PRESTIGE. AT MIDNIGHT, HE WAS IN THE DESERTED BALL PARK, IN THE MOONLIT FIELD, WAITING.
HELLO, HERBIE...
WHAT THE ? READY! DOC WHITE! THE HAYVILLE TEAM. WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?

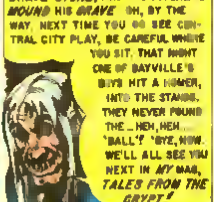
SO NOW YOU KNOW, FIENDS. NOW YOU KNOW WHY THERE IS A BALL GAME BEING PLAYED IN THE MOONLIGHT AT MIDNIGHT IN THE DESERTED CENTRAL CITY BALL PARK. LOOK CLOSELY. SEE THIS STRANGE BASEBALL GAME? SEE THE LONG STRINGS OF PULPY INTESTINES THAT MARK THE BASE LINES. SEE THE TWO LUNGS AND THE LIVER THAT INDICATE THE BASES... THE HEART THAT IS HOME PLATE... SEE DOC WHITE BEND AND WHIRL THE HEART WITH THE MANGY SCALP YELLING...



SEE THE SATTEN COME TO THE PLATE SWINGING THE LEGS THE ARMS, THEN THROWING ALL BUT ONE AWAY AND STANDING IN THE BOX WAITING FOR THE PITCHER TO HURL THE HEAD IN TO HIM. SEE THE CATCHER WITH THE TORSO STRAPPED ON AS A CHEST-PROTECTOR, THE INFIELDERS WITH THEIR HAND-MITS, THE STOMACH-ROBIN-BAG, AND ALL THE OTHER PIECES OF EQUIPMENT THAT ONCE WAS CENTRAL CITY'S STAR PITCHER, HERBIE SATTEN...

AND IN THE MORNING, WATCH THE FACES OF THE FANS AS THEY PACK THE PARK AND SEE THE GREEN GRASS NOW STAINED RED, AND SEE THE HASTILY SUBSTITUTED PITCHER STEP TO THE RUBBER AND STARE DOWN AT THE STONE PLAQUE EMBEDDED THERE WITH THE ENGRAVED WORDS MEMORIALIZING THE GORY REMAINS BURIED BENEATH THE PITCHER'S MOUND...

HEH, HEH! SO THAT'S MY YELP-YARN FOR THIS ISSUE, KIDDIES. HERBIE, THE PITCHER, WENT TO PIECES THAT NIGHT AND WAS TAKEN OUT... OUT OF EXISTENCE, THAT IS! THE PLAQUE TURNED OUT TO BE HIS BRAVE STONE, AND THE PITCHER'S MOUND HIS BRAVE OH, BY THE WAY, NEXT TIME YOU GO SEE CENTRAL CITY PLAY, BE CAREFUL WHERE YOU SIT. THAT NIGHT ONE OF BAYVILLE'S BOYS HIT A HOMER, INTO THE STANDS. THEY NEVER FOUND THE... HEH, HEH... 'BALL'! 'BYE, NOW. WE'LL ALL SEE YOU NEXT IN MY MAG, TALES FROM THE CRYPT!



COUNTER-CLOCKWISE

WHEN THE TRI-D WAS OVER, DAD AND I HOPPED INTO OUR ATOMIC CRUISER AND SPED OUT OF THE CITY...

WELL, RON? WHAT'S ON YOUR *MIND?*

I'D...I'D LIKE TO *JOIN UP*, DAD! I'D... LIKE YOU TO GIVE ME YOUR *PERMISSION!*

DAD'S FACE PALED! HE WAS SILENT FOR A MOMENT! THEN HE CUT THE PILE-ENERGIZER AND THE CRUISER SLOWED DOWN TO A STOP! HE LOOKED AT ME, AND I THOUGHT I SAW A TEAR IN HIS EYE...

ARE YOU *SURE*, RON? ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO *DO* IT...*JOIN UP?* IT'S A *RISKY BUSINESS!* YOU MIGHT BE...

ANYTHING A FELLOW DOES IS RISKY *TODAY*, DAD! *YOU* RISK YOUR LIFE EVERY DAY DOWN AT THE PORT *SERVICING* THE SHIPS! WELL, I WANT TO *FLY* TOO...

BUT *FLYING* A ROCKET SHIP IS *DIFFERENT!* BESIDES! WHAT WILL YOU DO...*AFTERWARD?* YOU'LL SPEND *FIVE* YEARS *TRAINING*... *FIVE* YEARS ON *ACTIVE DUTY*... AND *THEN*... YOU'LL BE *WASHED UP*... *FINISHED*...

WELL, *YOU'RE* NOT *WASHED UP*, DAD! AND *YOU* FLEW 'EM...

LOOK, SON! ONCE YOU'VE BEEN *OUT THERE*...*OUT IN SPACE*...YOU'LL *NEVER* BE *SATISFIED* WITH ANYTHING *ELSE!* AND AT TWENTY-SIX, A ROCKET PILOT IS *RETIRED*...*TOO OLD!*

BUT, AT LEAST YOU HAD *THOSE* FEW YEARS...

YES, BUT *SPACE TRAVEL* GETS INTO YOUR *BLOOD*, SON! IT BECOMES YOUR *LIFE!* THEN ONE DAY, THEY COME AND TELL YOU YOUR LIFE IS *OVER*...JUST LIKE *THAT!*

YOUR LIFE WASN'T *OVER!* YOU MARRIED *MOM*...YOU BOUGHT A *HOME*...AND YOU HAD *ME*...

YOU CAN'T *UNDERSTAND*... NOT TILL YOU'VE BEEN *OUT* THERE! AND THEN IT'S *TOO LATE!* THEY GET *HOLD* OF YOU...THOSE *STARS*... AND *PLANETS*... AND THAT ENDLESS VASTNESS... AND THEY *NEVER* LET YOU GO! AND EVEN AFTER YOU *STOP* FLYING...THEY *CALL* TO YOU... AND... AND... *GASP*...

POP! WHAT *IS* IT? WHAT DO YOU *SEE?*

THERE WAS A TINY NEEDLE OF FLAME IN THE SKY... POINTING EARTHWARD...RUSHING DOWN AT US...

IT'S A *SHIP*, RON! A *SPACE SHIP!* AND IT'S *NOT AN EARTH SHIP!*

POP! ARE YOU *SURE?*

THE FLAME GREW LARGER AND ANGRIER AS IT CAME AT US...
I KNOW EVERY ROCKET-ENGINE IN THE FLEET... AND NO ENGINE HAS AN EXHAUST LIKE THAT!
POP! COULD IT... COULD IT BE...?
AND SOON WE COULD SEE THE GLEAMING SHAPE OF THE ONCOMING ROCKET-SHIP!
THERE'S NO OTHER LIFE IN THIS SOLAR SYSTEM! WE KNOW THAT NOW! IT HAS TO BE...
VISITORS FROM ANOTHER STAR'S SOLAR SYSTEM!
AND EVEN AS IT THUNDERED ABOVE US DROPPING TOWARD EARTH, I SHUDDERED...
C'MON, SON! IT'S LANDING!
WAIT, POP! THEY... THEY... MIGHT BE DANGEROUS... HOSTILE...
MY FATHER HESITATED FOR A MOMENT, THEN RUSHED BACK TO THE CRUISER...
YOU'RE RIGHT, RON! I'VE GOT A BLASTER IN HERE! WE'D BETTER NOT TAKE ANY CHANCES!
IT'S DOWN, POP! THE SHIP'S DOWN...
DAD SLIPPED THE BLASTER FROM ITS RACK AND WE TROTTED ACROSS THE FIELD TOWARD THE NEWLY ARRIVED ALIEN SHIP! IT STOOD AMID THE HEAT AND SMOKE OF ITS SILENCED ROCKET ENGINES... WAITING.
LOOK, DAD! A PORT'S OPENING!
SOMETHING'S COMING OUT!
I STOPPED DEAD IN MY TRACKS AT WHAT I SAW! I COULD HEAR POP SUCK IN HIS BREATH AS HE CAUGHT SIGHT OF IT TOO...
GOOD LORD!
POP! POP!
IT WAS HORRIBLE... THE MOST HORRIBLE CREATURE I'D EVER SEEN! IT RUSHED AT US, ITS EYES BURNING, ITS LOATHESOME FLESH CRAWLING... SCREAMING...
KILL IT, POP! KILL IT!
STAND BACK, RON!

THE SUMMER NIGHT SILENCE WAS SHATTERED WITH THE EAR-SPLITTING REPORT FROM DAD'S URANIUM-BLASTER! THE DISGUSTING THING, RUSHING AT US WITH HATE AND FIRE IN ITS EYES, PITCHED FORWARD... FALLING AT MY FEET...

CHOKE...

KEEP *AWAY* FROM IT, RON! IT MAY NOT BE *DEAD!*

THUMP

THE THING TWITCHED, LIFTED ITS UGLY HEAD, LOOKED AT ME FOR A BURNING MOMENT, THEN CLOSED ITS EYES...

IT'S DEAD *NOW*, POP!

RON! RON, DO YOU REALIZE WHAT THIS *MEANS?* THAT *SHIP!* THAT SHIP HOLDS THE *KEY* TO *INTER-STELLAR TRAVEL!* AND NOW IT'S *OURS!*

WE WAITED, BUT NO OTHER HORRIBLE ALIENS CAME FROM THE SHIP. WE WAITED FOR A LONG TIME, LOOKING UP AT THE SILVER GIANT. OTHER CRUISERS BEGAN TO ARRIVE...

WHAT'S GOING *ON?* WHAT *HAPPENED?*

IT WAS AN *ALIEN SHIP!* IT CARRIED A *HOSTILE ALIEN!* I *KILLED* IT!

NEEDLESS TO SAY, DAD BECAME A NATIONAL HERO! THE CAPTURED ALIEN SHIP WAS EXAMINED BY SCIENTISTS AND ROCKET ENGINEERS. THEY ANNOUNCE:

THE ROCKET-SHIP CAPTURED BY *SAMUEL TRAVIS* AND HIS SON *RONALD* IS *UNQUESTIONABLY CAPABLE OF INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL!* A WHOLE NEW *ERA OF SPACE TRAVEL* LIES BEFORE US! THE SECRET IS *OURS...*

NATURALLY, IN MY INTERVIEWS WITH REPORTERS, I EXPRESSED MY DESIRES TO JOIN THE ROCKET FLEET! OR MY SIXTEENTH BIRTHDAY, DAD RELUCTANTLY GRANTED HIS PERMISSION.

I CAN'T VERY WELL *REFUSE* YOU, BOY! THE WHOLE *WORLD* WOULD HEAR OF IT!

THANKS, DAD!

AND SO, I ENLISTED...

ROCKET CADET RONALD TRAVIS REPORTING, SIR!

THIS WAY, TRAVIS! I'LL TAKE YOU TO YOUR QUARTERS.

THAT FIRST DAY MY CADET OFFICER LED ME PAST THE ALIEN ROCKET MY FATHER AND I HAD 'CAPTURED' FOUR MONTHS BEFORE...

LOOK FAMILIAR, TRAVIS?

YES, SIR!

FOR FIVE YEARS FROM MY SIXTEENTH TO TWENTY-FIRST BIRTHDAY, I WAS TRAINED...
LET'S GO, TRAVIS! KEEP THOSE LEGS STRAIGHT OUT! TO THE TOP...LET'S GO...
THE NEWLY DISCOVERED INTER-STELLAR DRIVE IS A COMBINATION OF MAGNETIC FIELD AMPLIFICATION AND...
CADET TRAVIS! GIVE ME THE APPROACH AND LET-DOWN PROCEDURE FOR A PLANET HAVING A DENSITY OF 5.32 AND AN ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE AT ITS SURFACE OF 20.1 LBS. PER SQUARE INCH...
CADET TRAVIS! REPORT TO THE NORTH LAUNCHING SITE FOR SOLO...
AND THEN, BEFORE I KNEW IT, I WAS GRADUATED...
CONGRATULATIONS, CAPTAIN TRAVIS...
CAPTAIN?! I...I... THANK YOU, SIR!
CAPTAIN, DAD! I MADE CAPTAIN...RIGHT OFF THE BAT!
I PROUD OF YOU, SON! PROUD OF YOU!
A MONTH'S FURLOUGH HOME...THEN ASSIGNMENT...
CAPTAIN TRAVIS! FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS, YOU HAVE BEEN SPECIFICALLY TRAINED FOR ONE PURPOSE! YOU ARE HEREBY ASSIGNED TO THE INTERSTELLAR FLIGHT DIVISION OF THE FLEET...
YES, SIR!
NOW THIS MAY COME AS A SHOCK TO YOU, TRAVIS WE'VE KEPT IT A SECRET FOR SOME TIME BUT THE FLEET ENGINEERS HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO COPY OR EVEN SOLVE THE INTERSTELLAR SPACE-DRIVE USED IN THE ROCKET SHIP YOU AND YOUR FATHER CAPTURED! THAT SHIP IS THE ONLY SHIP IN THIS WING! AND IT'S YOURS...

ON A JUNE AFTERNOON IN 2038 I WAS BRIEFED ON MY FIRST MISSION...
YOUR JOB, TRAVIS, WILL BE TO FIND THE PLANET THAT THIS SHIP CAME FROM! YOU WILL NOT LAND.. MERELY OBSERVE! YOUR ROUTE HAS BEEN LAID OUT! ALPHA CENTAURI, OUR NEAREST STAR, WILL BE YOUR FIRST DESTINATION! WE DO NOT KNOW IF IT HAS A SOLAR SYSTEM! FROM THERE, YOU WILL PROCEED TO...
AND WHAT IF I DO NOT FIND THE PLANET, SIR?
YOU WILL RETURN TO EARTH BY 2037! ANOTHER WILL TAKE YOUR PLACE! YOU KNOW THE RETIREMENT RULES!
YES, SIR!
ON JULY 3RD, 2038, I TOOK OFF FROM EARTH IN THE ALIEN SPACE SHIP...
BEYOND PLUTO, THE OUTERMOST PLANET IN OUR SOLAR SYSTEM, I LOST RADIO CONTACT AS WAS EXPECTED...
TRAVIS... CALLING FLEET STATION PLUTO! TRAVIS... CALLING... IT'S NO USE!
AND SIX MONTHS LATER I NEARED ALPHA CENTAURI...
TWO PLANETS! ALPHA CENTAURI DOES HAVE A SOLAR SYSTEM!
I CIRCLED THE PLANET OF ALPHA CENTAURI'S SOLAR SYSTEM. THE OUTER ONE WAS FRIGID.. COVERED WITH ICE AND SNOW...
NO LIFE DOWN THERE!
THE ONE CLOSEST TO THE STAR WAS GREEN... LIKE EARTH...
FOLIAGE! CLOUDS! THIS ONE COULD BE IT! I KNOW I'VE BEEN ORDERED NOT TO. BUT I'M GOING IN! I'M GOING TO LAND!

I CHECKED MY READINGS CAREFULLY...ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE...DENSITY...ROTATION...
ROTATION!? GOOD LORD! THIS PLANET ROTATES COUNTER-CLOCKWISE...EAST TO WEST...EXACTLY OPPOSITE TO THE WAY EARTH ROTATES! WELL! HERE GOES...
IT WAS TRICKY...TOO TRICKY! THE PLANET'S REVERSE ROTATION CONFUSED ME! I MESSED UP THE LANDING...BADLY...
KRUMP
WHEN I CHECKED MY WATCH TO NOTE THE TIME OF LANDING IN THE LOG, MY BLOOD FROZE...
MY WATCH! THE SECOND HAND IT'S GOING BACKWARDS!
IT WAS TRUE! MY WATCH HAD COMPLETELY REVERSED ITS ACTION...
IT...IT MUST HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE PLANET'S REVERSE ROTATION!
I EXAMINED THE SHIP! I'D DAMAGED THE REAR FINS! I COULDN'T TAKE OFF...
IT'LL TAKE ME MONTHS TO FIX THESE FINS! MAYBE A YEAR...
AND THEN IT HAPPENED. ABOUT SIX MONTHS AFTER MY CRASH LANDING, I NOTICED THEM...
SORES...ALL OVER MY BODY! MY HANDS! MY FACE...
I WAS SICK! THE SORES GOT WORSE! I BEGAN TO PASS OUT! I HAD TO GIVE UP WORKING ON THE SHIP.
I'VE BEEN HERE...OVER A YEAR! I...I HAVEN'T THE STRENGTH TO WORK! AND THESE SORES...
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THE CUT BREAKS ON MY SKIN FESTERED AND I RAN HIGH FEVERS! I WORKED LESS AND LESS ON THE SHIP! TWO YEARS PASSED! FIVE! EIGHT! THEN
YES! OVER TEN YEARS AFTER MY CRASH LANDING, I WAS FINALLY ABLE TO TAKE OFF FOR EARTH! WHAT A WELCOME SIGHT IT WAS WHEN IT APPEARED ON THE VIEW SCREEN...
HOME ...SON... HOME ... AT LAST!
I LOOKED DOWN AT THE YOUNG BOY AND THE MAN RUSHING TOWARD THE SHIP... AND I WANTED TO CRY...
BUT I DID NOT REALIZE HOW HORRIBLE I MUST HAVE LOOKED TO THEM! I'D GROWN USED TO WHAT THE FESTERING DISEASE HAD DONE TO ME... THERE ON THAT BACKWARD PLANET! I SAW THE FEAR AND LOATHING IN THEIR EYES...
WAIT! NO! I'M A HUMAN BEING! DON'T BE FRIGHTENED!
NOW DID I REALIZE THAT I'D LOST THE POWER OF SPEECH! ALL THAT ERRUPTED FROM MY THROAT WAS A SCREAM... NOT WHAT I'D MEANT TO SAY...
ERRAUK!!
KILL IT, POP! KILL IT!
STAND BACK, RON!
RON! THE BOY'S NAME WAS RON! AND THE OLDER ONE... I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT! THE OLDER ONE WAS MY FATHER! AND HE WAS AIMING HIS URANIUM BLASTER AT ME... FIRING IT...
FLLAM!
I FELL AT THE BOY'S FEET! AND I KNEW... I KNEW...
CHOKE...
KEEP AWAY FROM IT, RON! IT MAY NOT BE DEAD!
AS THE BLACKNESS OF DEATH CLOSED OVER ME I REALIZED THAT TIME, TOO, WAS REVERSED ON THAT BACKWARD PLANET! MY WATCH HAD TOLD ME THAT I'D GONE BACK IN TIME TEN YEARS OR MORE! AND I'D BROUGHT THAT SHIP TO EARTH! I'D BEEN THAT MONSTER MY FATHER HAD KILLED! BUT... THEN WHO BUILT... THE SHIP...?

ZERO HOUR

IT WAS AN INTERESTING FACT THAT THE FURY AND BUSTLE OCCURRED ONLY AMONG THE YOUNGER CHILDREN. THE OLDER ONES, THOSE TEN YEARS AND MORE, DISDAINED THE AFFAIR AND MARCHED SOORNFULLY OFF ON HIKES, OR PLAYED A MORE DIGNIFIED GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK ON THEIR OWN. MEANWHILE, PARENTS CAME AND WENT IN CHROMIUM BEETLE CARS, REPAIRMEN CAME TO REPAIR VACUUM ELEVATORS IN HOUSES, TO FIX FLUTTERING TELEVISION SETS, OR HAMMER UPON STUBBORN FOOD DELIVERY TUBES. THE ADULT CIVILIZATION PASSED AND REPASSED THE BUSY YOUNGSTERS... IGNORING THEM...

THIS... AND THIS... AND *THIS*. DO THAT, AND BRING *THAT* OVER HERE. NO! *HERE*, NINNY! RIGHT NOW, GET BACK WHILE I FIX THIS, THERE! SEE?

ADAPTED FROM A STORY BY RAY BRADBURY

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IN ALMOST EVERY YARD ON THE STREET, CHILDREN BROUGHT OUT KNIVES AND FORKS AND POKERS AND OLD STOVEPIPES AND CAN OPENERS...

I WANNA PLAY.

GO AWAY. YOU'D JUST MAKE FUN OF US.

TWELVE-YEAR-OLD JOSEPH BONNERS SURVEYED THE YOUNGER CHILDREN WITH RELUCTANCE AND A CERTAIN WISTFULNESS...

HONEST, I WOULDN'T MAKE FUN. LET ME PLAY...

YOU'RE TOO OLD. YOU'D ONLY LAUGH AND SPOIL THE INVASION.

JOSEPH WALKED OFF SLOWLY. HE KEPT LOOKING BACK, ALL DOWN THE BLOCK. MINK TALKED EARNESTLY TO SOMEONE NEAR THE ROSE BUSH. THOUGH THERE WAS NO ONE THERE. ANNA TOOK NOTES ON A PAD.

TRIANGLE!

HUH? HOW DO YOU SPELL IT?

MINK'S MOTHER, FROM HER UPSTAIRS WINDOW, GAZED DOWN...

T-R-I-...OH, SPELL IT YOURSELF! NOW, BEAM!

I STILL HAVEN'T GOT THE ANGLE DOWN YET!

A-N-G-L-E, ANNA!

OH, THANKS, MRS. MORRIS!

THAT'S ALL RIGHT, ANNA!

NOW, BEAM! THEN...FOUR-NINE-SEVEN-A-AND-B-AND-X...

MINK'S MOTHER WITHDREW, LAUGHING TO OUST THE HALL WITH AN ELECTRO-DUSTEN MAGNET...

...AND A FORK... AND A STRING... AND A HEX... HEX... HEX A BONY... HEXAGONAL!

AT LUNCH, MINK GULPED HER AT ONE TOSS AND WAS AT THE DOOR. MRS. MORRIS SLAPPED THE TABLE...

YOU SIT RIGHT BACK DOWN AND FINISH...

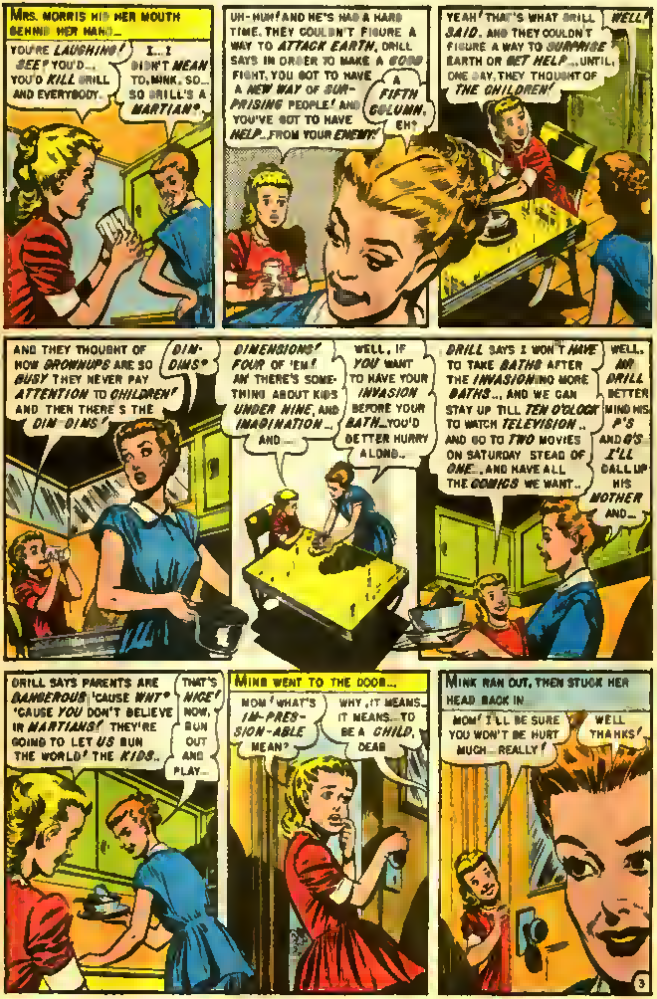
BUT MOM! GRILL'S WAITING FOR ME!

GRILL? WHAT A PECULIAR NAME? WHO'S GRILL?

YOU DON'T KNOW HIM, MOM. YOU'LL MAKE FUN EVERYBODY POKES FUN. GEE, DARN. I GOT TO RUN IF WE WANT TO HAVE THE INVASION!

WHO'S INVADING WHAT?

MARTIANS... INVADING EARTH!


MRS. MORRIS HID HER MOUTH BEHIND HER HAND...
YOU'RE LAUGHING! SEE? YOU'D... YOU'D KILL DRILL AND EVERYBODY.
I...I DIDN'T MEAN TO, MINK. SO... SO DRILL'S A MARTIAN?
UH-HUH! AND HE'S HAD A HARD TIME. THEY COULDN'T FIGURE A WAY TO ATTACK EARTH. DRILL SAYS IN ORDER TO MAKE A GOOD FIGHT, YOU GOT TO HAVE A NEW WAY OF SURPRISING PEOPLE! AND YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE HELP...FROM YOUR ENEMY!
A FIFTH COLUMN, EH?
YEAH! THAT'S WHAT DRILL SAID. AND THEY COULDN'T FIGURE A WAY TO SURPRISE EARTH OR GET HELP...UNTIL ONE DAY, THEY THOUGHT OF THE CHILDREN!
WELL!
AND THEY THOUGHT OF HOW GROWNUPS ARE SO BUSY! THEY NEVER PAY ATTENTION TO CHILDREN! AND THEN THERE'S THE DIM-DIMS!
DIM-DIMS?
DIMENSIONS! FOUR OF 'EM! AM THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT KIDS UNDER NINE, AND IMAGINATION... AND...
WELL, IF YOU WANT TO HAVE YOUR INVASION BEFORE YOUR BATH...YOU'D BETTER HURRY ALONG...
DRILL SAYS I WON'T HAVE TO TAKE BATHS AFTER THE INVASION NO MORE BATHS..., AND WE CAN STAY UP TILL TEN O'CLOCK TO WATCH TELEVISION... AND GO TO TWO MOVIES ON SATURDAY STEAD OF ONE..., AND HAVE ALL THE COMICS WE WANT...
WELL, MR DRILL BETTER MIND HIS P'S AND Q'S I'LL CALL UP HIS MOTHER AND...
DRILL SAYS PARENTS ARE DANGEROUS 'CAUSE WHY? 'CAUSE YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN MARTIANS! THEY'RE GOING TO LET US RUN THE WORLD! THE KIDS...
THAT'S NICE! NOW, RUN OUT AND PLAY...
MINK WENT TO THE DOOR...
MOM! WHAT'S IM-PRES-SION-ABLE MEAN?
WHY, IT MEANS... IT MEANS...TO BE A CHILD, DEAR
MINK RAN OUT, THEN STUCK HER HEAD BACK IN...
MOM! I'LL BE SURE YOU WON'T BE HURT MUCH...REALLY!
WELL THANKS!
3

AT FOUR O'CLOCK, THE AUDIO-VISOR BUZZED. MARY MORRIS FLIPPED THE TAB AND THE SCREEN LIT UP...

HELLO, HELEN! THIS IS A SURPRISE! HOW ARE THINGS IN NEW YORK? YOU LOOK TIRED!

HELLO, MARY. I AM TIRED. THE CHILDREN, UNDERFOOT...

MY MINK, TOO. THE SUPER-INVASION!

ARE YOUR KIDS PLAYING THAT GAME TOO?

LORD, YES. WERE WE THIS BAD WHEN WE WERE KIDS, HELEN?

WORSE. DON'T KNOW HOW MY PARENTS PUT UP WITH ME. I GUESS PARENTS LEARN TO SHUT THEIR EARS!

A SILENCE...

WHAT'S WRONG, MARY?

EH? OH, NOTHING. JUST THINKING... ABOUT SHUTTING EARS AND SUCH... NEVER MIND WHERE WE'RE WE.

MY BOY TIM'S GOT A CRUSH ON SOME GUY NAMED... DAVIL, I THINK IT IS!

MUST BE A NEW PASS-WORD. MINK LIKES HIM TOO.

DIDN'T KNOW IT HAD GOTTEN AS FAR SOUTH AS PHILADELPHIA, MARY! I TALKED TO MY SISTER IN BOSTON AND SHE SAID HER KIDS ARE WILD ABOUT THIS NEW GAME!

IT... IT MUST BE SWEEP-ING THE... COUNTRY!

AT THIS MOMENT MINK TROTTED INTO THE KITCHEN. MARY MORRIS TURNED FROM THE AUDIO-VISOR...

WHAT'S THAT YOU HAVE THERE, MINK?

A YO-YO, MOM... WATCH...

MINK FLUNG THE YO-YO DOWN ITS STRING, REACHING THE END, IT VANISHED...

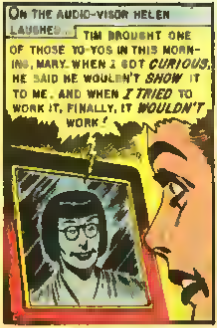
SEE?

GASP

DIBBLING HER FINGER, MINK MADE THE YO-YO REAPPEAR AND ZIP UP THE STRING...

I DO THAT AGAIN!

CAN'T ZERO HOUR'S FIVE O'CLOCK! BYE!

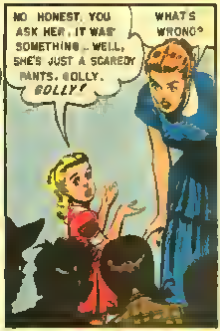

ON THE AUDIO-VISOR HELEN LAUGHED... TIM BROUGHT ONE OF THOSE YO-YOS IN THIS MORNING, MARY. WHEN I GOT CURIOUS, HE SAID HE WOULDN'T SHOW IT TO ME. AND WHEN I TRIED TO WORK IT, FINALLY, IT WOULDN'T WORK!

MRS. MORRIS WHISPERED...
YOU'RE NOT IMPRESSIONABLE, HELEN!
I WHAT?

NEVER MIND... SOMETHING I THOUGHT OF. CAN I HELP YOU, HELEN?
I WANTED TO GET THAT BLACK AND WHITE CAKE RECIPE...

THE HOUR DROWSED BY, THE DAY WANED. THE SUN LOWERED IN THE PEACEFUL BLUE SKY. ONE LITTLE GIRL RAN OFF CRYING...
MINK, WAS THAT PEGGY ANN CRYING?
YEAH. SHE'S A SCAREBABY. WE WON'T LET HER PLAY, NOW. SHE'S GETTING TOO OLD TO PLAY.

MINK WAS BENT OVER IN THE YARD NEAR THE ROSE BUSH...
I GUESS SHE GREW UP ALL OF A SUDDEN
MINK! DID YOU HIT PEGGY ANN?


NO HONEST. YOU ASK HER, IT WAS SOMETHING... WELL, SHE'S JUST A SCAREDY PANTS. GOLLY. GOLLY!
WHAT'S WRONG?

THE RING OF CHILDREN DREW IN AROUND MINK WHERE SHE SCOWLED AT HER WORK WITH SPOONS AND A KIND OF SQUARE-SHAPED ARRANGEMENT OF HAMMERS AND PIPES...
DRILL'S STUCK HALF-WAY.
HALF WAY?

IF WE COULD ONLY GET HIM ALL THE WAY THROUGH, IT'D BE EASIER. THEN ALL THE OTHERS COULD COME THROUGH AFTER HIM!
CAN I HELP?

NO M, THANKS. I'LL FIX IT...
ALL RIGHT, DEAR. HALF AN HOUR MORE. THEN BATH TIME.

MRS. MORRIS WENT BACK INSIDE. TIME PASSED. A CURIOUS, WAITING SILENCE CAME UPON THE STREET, DEEPENING...

FIVE O'CLOCK...FIVE O'CLOCK. TIME'S A-WASTING. FIVE O'CLOCK...

THE VONE-CLOCK SANG SOFTLY IN A QUIET MUSICAL VOICE, THEN PURRED AWAY IN SILENCE. MRS. MORRIS CHUCKLED IN HER THROAT.

ZERO...HOUR...

MR. MORRIS'S BEETLE CAR HUMMED INTO THE DRIVEWAY. HE GOT OUT, STOOD FOR A MOMENT WATCHING THE CHILDREN, THEN CAME INSIDE.

HELLO, DARLING.

HELLO, HENRY.

MRS. MORRIS LISTENED. THE CHILDREN WERE SILENT. ... TOO SILENT. MR. MORRIS EMPTIED HIS PIPE...

SWELL DAY. MAKES YOU GLAD TO BE *ALIVE*.

WHAT'S *THAT?*

A BUZZING SOUND. MARY GOT UP SUDDENLY, HER EYES WIDENING...

THOSE CHILDREN HAVEN'T ANYTHING *DANGEROUS* OUT THERE, HAVE THEY?

NOTHING BUT *PIPES* AND *HAMMERS*. *WHY?*

THE BUZZING CONTINUED...

NOTHING ELECTRICAL?

HECK, NO! I LOCKED.

JUST THE SAME, YOU'D BETTER TELL THEM TO QUIT. IT'S AFTER FIVE. TELL THEM...HEH, HEH... TELL THEM TO PUT OFF THEIR INVASION UNTIL TOMORROW...

THE BUZZING GREW LOUDER

SAY! WHAT *ARE* THEY UP TO? I'D BETTER GO LOOK.

THE EXPLOSION...

THE HOUSE SHOOK WITH A DULL SOUND. THERE WERE OTHER EXPLOSIONS IN OTHER YARDS ON OTHER STREETS...

UP THIS WAY! IN THE ATTIC!

IT'S NOT UP THERE! IT'S OUTSIDE!

THERE WAS NO TIME TO ARGUE WITH HENRY. LET HIM THINK HER INSANE! SHRIEKING, SHE RAN UPSTAIRS...

I'LL SHOW YOU! HURRY! HURRY! I'LL SHOW YOU!

MARY!

ANOTHER EXPLOSION OUTSIDE. THE CHILDREN SCREAMED WITH DELIGHT AS IF AT A GREAT FIREWORKS DISPLAY. HENRY RAN AFTER MARY... UP INTO THE ATTIC...

THERE, THERE. WE'RE SAFE UNTIL TONIGHT! MAYBE WE CAN SNEAK OUT. MAYBE WE CAN ESCAPE...

ARE YOU CRAZY, MARY? WHAT'S GOT INTO YOU?

SHE WAS BABBLING WILD STUFF NOW. IT CAME OUT OF HER. ALL THE SUBCONSCIOUS SUSPICIONS AND FEAR. SHE SLAMMED THE DOOR... LOCKED IT... FLUNG THE KEY INTO A FAR, GLUTTERED CORNER...

WHY'D YOU THROW THE KEY AWAY, MARY?

QUIET! THEY WILL HEAR US. OH, GOD, THEY'LL FIND US SOON ENOUGH...

BELOW THEN, MINK'S VOICE. THEN FOOTSTEPS CAME INTO THE HOUSE, HEAVY FOOTSTEPS...

WHO'S THAT TRAMPING AROUND DOWN THERE?

MOM? DAD? WHERE ARE YOU?

HEAVY FEET. TWENTY, THIRTY, FORTY OF THEM...

WHO'S DOWNSTAIRS?

HUSH, HENRY! OH, NONONONO! PLEASE BE QUIET! THEY MIGHT GO AWAY!

HEAVY, VERY HEAVY FOOTSTEPS CAME UP THE STAIRS. MINK LEADING THEM. THEY TREMBLED TOGETHER IN SILENCE IN THE ATTIC, MR. AND MRS. MORRIS. THEY STOOD SHIVERING IN THE DARK SILENCE...

MOM? DAD?

A LITTLE HUMMING SOUND, THE ATTIC LOCK MELTED. THE DOOR OPENED. MINK PEERED INSIDE... TALL BLUE SHADOWS BEHIND HER...

PEEKABOO!

—THE END—

THE ASHTRAY

The graying light was even older by the time it struggled through the thirteen years accumulation of cobwebs that festooned the window over Professor Quagmire Bog's workbench. He sat there, high up in the dome of his mountain-top laboratory, munching a withered apple.

Quagmire flipped the core into an immense brass ashtray nearby. For years, the patient concave receptacle had contained thousands of odds and ends in silence. During thirteen long years of intense research . . . thirteen long years of trial and error . . . Bog had thrown wires, gears and other mechanical debris into the grossing ashtray. Not once in all that time had he thought to empty it!

"Hi-diddle-dee-dee . . . it's the scientific life for me!", sang the triumphant professor. And he had cause to sing! Quagmire Bog had invented a cuckoo clock . . . a very unique cuckoo clock . . . a revolutionary cuckoo clock! A cuckoo clock with a little birdie that came out *sideway* . . . through a *revolving door*.

This amazing innovation had caused immediate concern in distant Switzerland! And well they might be disturbed! Their centuries-long reputation for fine time-piece making was at stake! They had but one recourse! They would send a special delegation of watchmakers to Professor Bog's mountain top sanctum in Hoboken . . . with instructions to offer the inventor any price for the patent and working model of his sideways cuckoo. To be sure, this important transaction, the gallant little Swiss nation had backed their one and only navy!

And now Professor Bog was clearing his cluttered workbench in anticipation of the delegation's arrival. What a mess! He picked up the metallic remains of his perpetual motion machine which he had forgotten to reward long ago. He chucked it onto the pile on the ashtray.

Next, he came upon a Chinese puzzle of linked rings. Sadly he uttered, "The essence of that to be solved is the unsolved . . . and what could better understand the unsolved but that which is also unsolved?" He threw the puzzle on the heap of other unsolved objects!

The clean-up campaign continued. Bog came upon a miniature guillotine he'd once contrived for clipping his toe-nails. "Made it more sporting", he recalled. He relegated it to the mound . . . and the ashtray shuddered!

Now the professor was denuding his bench furiously. A blood-caked apple pencil, a tarnished trombone slide, a blueprint for digging a proposed canal which was to be named Panama, a batch of radio-active pecan studded chocolate bars, a fire-extinguisher full of flat beer, a cyclotron full of dirty shirts and finally, an old battered alarm clock . . . *with a radium dial* . . . caused the straining ashtray to rebel! A geiger counter on the bench clicked insistently. Bog paid no heed to its warnings. He simply scooped it up and hurled it to the very top of the pile.

Alpha, beta and gamma rays vaulted over the rim of the churning ashtray. All that junk had turned into an *atomic pile!* The radium dialed clock had been the catalyst . . . and the *fuel strain*.

The geiger counter stuttered feverishly, then there was a violent reaction and a mushroom cloud rose and flashed brilliantly in the evening sky!

. . . . . .

When the Swiss watch makers delegation arrived on the scene, the mountain top laboratory was gone. So was the mountain!

A gleaming brass ashtray rocked peacefully in the warm sun. The ashtray was empty!

HOMESICK!

HE COULD SEE THE SPACE STATION NOW, FLOATING LIKE SOME GIGANTIC WEINGLY SHAPED LIFE-RAFT UPON THE BLACK SEA OF SPACE. HE COULD SEE ITS LANDING RAMP AND ITS HATCHES AND THE LAUNCHING AREA WHERE, ONE YEAR BEFORE, HE — DAVID TODD — AND HIS BEST FRIEND — LAWRENCE ARDSLEY — HAD TAKEN OFF FOR MAN'S FIRST TRIP TO MARS. AND A THOUSAND MILES BEYOND, HE COULD SEE THE GREEN SPHERE OF EARTH... HOME...

IT *WON'T* BE *LONG NOW*, LYNN, BABY! IT *WON'T* BE LONG *NOW*! OH *HONEY*... IF YOU ONLY KNEW HOW I'VE *DREAMED* OF THIS *MOMENT!*

YES, DAVID WAS COMING HOME... HOME TO LYNN ARDSLEY... LARRY'S WIFE. BUT LYNN WASN'T LARRY'S WIFE ANY LONGER. LYNN WAS A WIDOW! LARRY HAD DIED...

HELLO, SPACE STATION! HELLO... SPACE STATION! THIS IS COLONEL TODD ON MARS SPACE-ROCKET NUMBER X-2! COME IN, SPACE STATION! COME IN...

DAVID FLIPPED ON THE RECEIVER AND WAITED FOR THE SPACE STATION TO ANSWER. HE THOUGHT ABOUT LYNN... BEAUTIFUL, DESIRABLE LYNN. HE THOUGHT ABOUT THAT NIGHT... THE NIGHT SHE AND DAVID HAD PLANNED LARRY'S MURDER!

IT WOULD BE SO *EASY*, BABY! LARRY WOULD NEVER GIVE YOU UP! BUT *UP THERE*... ON *MARS*... WELL... *ANYTHING* COULD HAPPEN...

OH, *DAVID*! I'M... I'M *SCARED*! WHAT IF HE *SUSPECTS*?

SUSPECTS THAT YOU AND I ARE IN *LOVE*? NOT A *CHANCE!* WE'VE BEEN TOO *CAREFUL*...

DAVID! CAN'T WE *WAIT*... UNTIL YOU *BOTH GET BACK*? PERHAPS IF I *TOLD* HIM I *DIDN'T LOVE* HIM ANY LONGER... IF I *ASKED* HIM FOR A *DIVORCE*...

HE WOULDN'T *GIVE* IT TO YOU, LYNN! YOU *KNOW* LARRY! HE'S TOO *PROUD!* *NO!* THIS IS THE *ONLY* WAY! MY *ONE CHANCE*...

WHAT WILL YOU *TELL* THEM? I MEAN, WHEN YOU GET *BACK*...?

I'LL TELL THEM THAT LARRY *CONTRACTED A DISEASE*... AND *DIED* THERE... ON *MARS!*

THERE WILL BE *OTHER SHIPS*, DAVID! OTHERS *AFTER* YOURS! YOU'LL HAVE TO MAKE *SURE* THEY *DON'T FIND HIS BODY*...

DAVID REMEMBERED THOSE TRIPS... THOSE REGULAR TRIPS UP TO THE SPACE-STATION TO CHECK ON THE PROGRESS OF SPACE-ROCKET X-2'S CONSTRUCTION...

SHE'S ALMOST FINISHED, DAVE!

ANOTHER WEEK AND WE'LL BE ON OUR WAY, LARRY...

THE SPACE STATION HAD BEEN STARTED BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT BACK IN 1969. IT HAD BEEN COMPLETED IN 1972. IN 1986, SPACE-ROCKET X-1 HAD SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED A TRIP TO THE MOON AND BACK. NOW, S-R X-2 WAS NEARING COMPLETION. MAN'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO REACH *MARS*...

LARRY! DAVID! TOMORROW YOU LEAVE! IT WILL TAKE YOU APPROXIMATELY FIVE MONTHS TO GET THERE...

YOU WILL STAY IN *CONSTANT TOUCH* WITH US THROUGH *MICRO-WAVE RADIO SIGNALS*. YOU WILL REPORT EVERY THING YOU FIND... EVERY *DETAIL*. IF MARS *DOES* HAVE A CIVILIZATION... AND IT PROVES *HOSTILE*... YOU WILL RETURN *AT ONCE!* MORE THAN LIKELY YOU WILL FIND *NO SIGN OF LIFE* ON MARS. *EXPLORE! PHOTOGRAPH! NOTE* ALL YOU SEE! GOOD LUCK!

THANK YOU, SIR!

AND THAT LAST NIGHT ON EARTH! DAVID REMEMBERED IT SO WELL! HE, AND LYNN, AND LARRY. TOGETHER... WISHING EACH OTHER HEALTH AND LUCK AND ALL GOOD THINGS... AND LARRY LAUGHING... NOT KNOWING THAT A WISH OF DEATH WAS IN DAVID'S AND LYNN'S HEARTS...

WELL! HERE'S TO YOU AND LYNN, LARRY! AND MANY MORE YEARS OF WEDDED BLISS!

TH-THANKS, DAVID!

HEY! WE'RE OUT OF ISE! I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!

THOSE STOLEN MOMENTS TOGETHER... WHEN LARRY WAS OUT OF THE ROOM...

DARLING! DARLING! WHEN I GET BACK AND YOU'RE FREE...

OH, HOLD ME, DAVID! HOLD ME...

...AND THAT MORNING AT THE ROCKET-PORT, WATCHING LARRY KISS LYNN GOODBYE, AND HATING HIM FOR IT...

GOOD-BYE, HONEY!

GOOD-BYE LARRY! TAKE CARE...

AND THEN THAT LAST SHUTTLE TRIP TO THE SPACE-STATION...

YOU... YOU'VE GOT A WONDERFUL GAL THERE, LARRY!

DON'T I KNOW IT!

DAVID COULD SEE THE LAUNCHING SITE ON THE SPACE-STATION AS THOUGH IT WERE YESTERDAY... CRAWLING WITH GRASS COME TO SEE THE MOMENTOUS EVENT...

STAND BY FOR TAKE-OFF! COLONELS TODD AND ARDSLEY... BOARD SHIP!

WELL, SO LONG, EVERYBODY!

SEE YOU IN A YEAR!

GOOD LUCK, YOU TWO!

THE SECONDS TICKING OFF... THE INTERMINABLE TIME UNTIL...

THERE THEY GO...

THOSE FIVE MONTHS ABOARD THE S-RX-2 WERE CLOUDED MEMORIES TO DAVID, NOW... A MIST OF HATE, AND NERVOUS PLANNING, AND HUNGRY THOUGHTS OF LYNN... BACK ON EARTH! AND THEN...

THERE SHE IS, DAVID! MARS...

STRAP IN, LARRY WE'RE PICKING UP MARS'S GRAVITATIONAL FIELD...

THE GLINDING PRESSURE OF LETTING DOWN... THE BLASTING OF THE ROCKET ENGINES AND THE SHUDDERING OF THE SHIP...

WE'RE GOING IN!

HOLD TIGHT!

AND THEN THE SILENCE... THE SILENCE OF MARS... ALL AROUND THEM...
HELLO, SPACE STATION! HELLO! THIS IS TODD ON S-RX-2! WE'VE MADE IT! WE'RE DOWN! STAND BY...
TRANSMIT THESE READINGS, DAVE! ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE AT SURFACE...
A HUNDRED OBSERVATIONS... A THOUSAND DESCRIPTIONS... HOURS OF TRANSMITTING SCIENTIFIC DATA...AND THEN...
AND NOW...WE'RE GOING TO LEAVE THE SHIP! ANDSLEY AND I HAVE OUR SPACE-SUITS ON EVEN THOUGH THE ATMOSPHERE APPEARS ABLE TO SUSTAIN US!
TELL 'EM WE'LL TRY TAKING 'EM OFF AFTER A WHILE, DAVE!
...THEN STEPPING OUT ONTO THE BARREN RED WASTE-LAND OF THE RED PLANET...
THAT'S ENOUGH PHOTOGRAPHS, LARRY! LET'S TRY TAKING OFF OUR HELMETS!
RIGHT, DAVE!
AND THAT MOMENT... THAT LONG AWAITED MOMENT ARRIVED! DAVE SLIPPED HIS GUN FROM ITS HOLSTER...
IT'S OKAY, DAVE! LIKE BEING ON A MOUNTAIN-TOP...ON EARTH! IT'S... WHAT... WHAT'S THE GUN FOR?
FOR YOU, LARRY! I'M GOING TO KILL YOU...
DAVID REMEMBERED HOW LARRY'S AMAZED EXPRESSION FROZE AS HE FINGERED THE TRIGGER...
HOW THE SHOT SHATTERED THE THICK RED SILENCE, AND LARRY PITCHING FORWARD...
...THEN... STANDING OVER HIM AS THE REPORT ECHOED BACK AND FORTH FROM ANGRY DUNE TO ANGRY DUNE...
SHE'S MINE. NOW, LARRY! LYNN'S MINE...

DAVID REMEMBERED HOW HE BURIED LARRY IN AN UNMARKED GRAVE...

THEN REPORTED...

THIS IS TODD, ON S-RX-2! WE'VE JUST COME BACK INSIDE! ARDSLEY DOESN'T FEEL WELL! WE... WE TOOK OFF OUR SPACE-HELMETS!

DAY AFTER DAY

HE'S GETTING WORSE! THE DRUGS IN THE MED KIT DON'T HELP! HE'S DYING...

...UNTIL...

COLONEL ARDSLEY IS *DEAD!* HIS *LAST REQUEST* WAS THAT I *JETTISON HIS BODY INTO SPACE* ON MY WAY *BACK!* I *PROMISED!* I'M *COMING HOME*... NOW!

HELLO... SPACE STATION! HELLO... SPACE STATION! THIS IS COLONEL TODD ON MARS SPACE-ROCKET X-2! WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER?

DAVID'S RECEIVER REMAINED SILENT! THE SPACE-STATION LOOMING LARGER AND LARGER BON, DID NOT RESPOND

STAND BY...! I'M COMING IN!

THE LAST OF THE S-RX-2'S FUEL WAS USED UP IN SLOWING THE SHIP! IT DRIFTED TOWARS THE LANDING RAMP, SUCKED IN BY THE HUSE TRACTION MAG-

GET THAT *SHUTTLE TO EARTH* READY BOYS! I'VE GOT A *DATE*...

A DEATHLY SILENCE HUNG OVER THE SPACE-STATION AS DAVID EMERGED FROM THE S-RX-2! THE STATION WAS DESERTED...

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE! WHERE IS EVERYBODY! THERE'S NO SHUTTLE ROCKET HERE!

DAVID DARTED DOWN A HATCH INTO THE SPACE STATION'S QUARTERS...

HEY! YOU KNEW I WAS COMING BACK! WHERE ARE YOU ALL? WHAT'S THE MATTER?

A LOUDSPEAKER BEHIND DAVID CRACKLED ON! A VOICE EXPLODED FROM BEHIND ITS GRILLED FACE...

COLONEL TODD! THIS IS GENERAL MINORLY, MEDICAL CORPS...ON EARTH! IT'S MY DUTY TO INFORM YOU THAT...

SINCE COLONEL LAWRENCE ARDSLEY CONTRACTED AND DIED OF AN UNKNOWN DISEASE WHICH DID NOT RESPOND TO ANY KNOWN EARTH DRUGS WHILE ON MARS...AND THAT SINCE YOU ALSO WERE OBVIOUSLY EXPOSED TO THAT DISEASE AND MIGHT AT THIS TIME BE A CARRIER OF IT...

...THAT FOR THE SAFETY OF THE TWO AND ONE HALF BILLION PEOPLES OF EARTH, YOU ARE HEREBY QUARANTINED ON THAT SPACE-STATION...FOR LIFE!

GENERAL MINORLY'S VOICE SOFTENED...

I'M SORRY, DAVE! GENUINELY SORRY! IT'S GOING TO BE TOUGH, I KNOW! BUT IT'S THE LIVES OF EVERYONE HERE AGAINST YOURS! YOU'LL FIND RATIONS...BOOKS...

BUT DAVID TODD DID NOT HEAR GENERAL MINORLY'S SOOTHING VOICE! DAVID TODD WAS CRYING...

THE END

JUDGMENT DAY!

THE MAN ROARED DOWN FROM THE NIGHT SKY. HE'D COME FROM THE INFINITE VOID OF SPACE... ACROSS THE ENDLESS COSMIC VACUUM... HE'D COME FROM THE PLANET EARTH. HE'D COME IN A SHIP OF GLEAMING ALLOYS... BELCHING BLUE FLAMES AND YELLOW CLOUDS OF ATOMIC DUST AND HE'D COME ALONE. HE STEPPED TO THE PORT AMID THE CHEERS OF THE ROBOT POPULATION.

WELCOME! WELCOME, EARTHMAN, TO CYBRINIA... TO THE PLANET OF MECHANICAL LIFE!

BLUE

THE MAN STEPPED FROM HIS GLEAMING SHIP. HE STEPPED INTO THE ARTIFICIAL SUNLIGHT THAT FLOODED THE LANDING SITE. HE EXTENDED HIS HAND...

I AM TARLTON... FROM "EARTH COLONIZATION." I AM HERE TO INSPECT. IF I FIND THAT YOU ARE READY...

WE ARE READY! WE HAVE LABORED LONG AND HARD TO PERFECT OUR SOCIETY. WE HAVE EXPERIMENTED AND DISCOVERED, PLANNED AND BUILT... ASKED AND ANSWERED. WE ARE READY...

TARLTON MOVED FORWARD THROUGH THE CROWD OF ORANGE ROBOTS THAT PRESSED AROUND HIM. HE STOPPED AND QUESTIONED ONE.

DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

YOU ARE TARLTON... FROM EARTH! YOU ARE A REPRESENTATIVE OF OUR ORIGINAL CREATORS! IF YOU FIND THAT WE ARE READY, ALL OF THE WONDERS AND GREATNESS OF EARTH WILL BE OURS.

TARLTON NODDED. THE ARTIFICIAL SUNLIGHT DANCED ON HIS SPACE HELMET.

QUITE RIGHT. THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, WE PLACED A *SMALL HANDFUL* OF YOU UPON THIS PLANET. THIS SMALL HANDFUL WAS GIVEN THE *KNOW-HOW* TO BUILD *MORE* OF YOU...

WE LEFT YOU TO *YOURSELVES*. WE HOPED THAT *IN TIME* YOU WOULD DEVELOP A SOCIETY WORTHY OF *INCLUSION* IN EARTH'S GREAT *GALACTIC REPUBLIC*. AT THAT TIME ALL OF OUR *SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES*, OUR *GLORY*, WOULD BECOME YOURS...

COME, TARLTON. LET US SHOW YOU WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED! LET US SHOW YOU THAT WE ARE READY...

LEAD THE WAY.

THE SPACE-SUIT CLAD EARTHMAN FOLLOWED THE ORANGE ROBOT PAST THE CROWD OF METAL ONLOOKERS TO A SLEEK-LOOKING LOW VEHICLE...

THIS IS KNOWN AS A MOBILE-CAR. IT WAS DEVELOPED QUITE SOME TIME AGO BY N-R-E-PHORD. IT OPERATES BY MEANS OF AN INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINE...

YES. GOOD! GOOD! *TWENTIETH CENTURY* LEVEL...

THE SPEEDY MOBILE-CAR SWEPT THE EARTHMAN THROUGH A SHINING CITY, ALONG STREETS JAMMED WITH CHEERING ORANGE ROBOTS...

THIS IS OUR CAPITOL CITY! THAT BUILDING *THERE* IS OUR *HOUSE OF DELEGATES*... *ELECTED BY THE POPULACE*...

HMMM. INTERESTING... DEMOCRATIC RULE. VERY GOOD... AND *THAT* BUILDING...

THE EARTHMAN POINTED TO A LONG LOW STRUCTURE...

THAT BUILDING IS OUR *CONSTRUCTION LINE* AND *ASSEMBLY PLANT* WHERE OUR *POPULATION* IS *MADE*...

STOP HERE. I WOULD LIKE TO *SEE* IT...

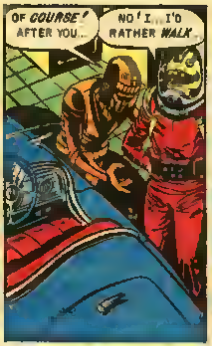
THE MOBILE-CAR PULLED UP BEFORE THE PLANT, AND THE EARTH-MAN GOT OUT. HE FOLLOWED HIS ORANGE ROBOT-GUIDE INTO THE BUILDING...

THIS IS THE *PARTS* DEPARTMENT WHERE OUR *UNITS* ARE *CONSTRUCTED*...

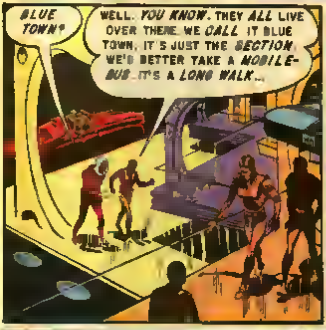
I SEE ONLY *ORANGE* WORKERS! WHAT ABOUT THE *BLUE* ROBOTS

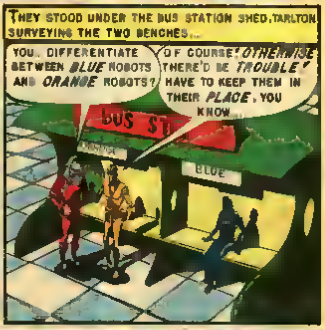
TARLTON'S GUIDE TURNED TO HIM SHAKING HIS HEAD...
OH' WE...WE MAKE ONLY ORANGE ROBOTS HERE. THE BLUE ROBOTS, WELL... I'LL TAKE YOU TO THEIR PLANT LATER...
I SEE. SHALL WE GO ON...
THEY MOVED FROM THE PARTS SECTION TO THE FINAL ASSEMBLY LINE.
HERE, THE SKELETONS ARE CONSTRUCTED, THE ORIGINAL ALLOY IS STILL USED.
NATURALLY!
THEY MOVED ALONG THE ASSEMBLY LINE.
HERE, THE INTERNAL UNITS... MOTORS, MAGNETS, RELAYS, POWER SUPPLIES, AND SO FORTH... ARE INSTALLED...
NO IMPROVEMENTS ON THE ORIGINAL DESIGN, I SEE.
NO! WE DARED NOT ATTEMPT IT. THESE MODELS WILL BE EXACTLY LIKE THE ORIGINALS...
AND THIS IS THE SHEATHING STAGE...
YES. HERE THE ORANGE OUTSIDE SHELLS ARE ATTACHED...
WHAT HAPPENS TO THE FINISHED ROBOT?
HE IS TESTED, THEN PLACED IN THE 'EDUCATOR', WHERE HIS MECHANICAL BRAIN IS CHARGED WITH ALL KNOWLEDGE AVAILABLE TO OUR SOCIETY...
AND THEN...
HE BECOMES A MEMBER OF THAT SOCIETY. FIRST, HE MUST WORK ON THE ASSEMBLY LINE FOR A SHORT PERIOD...
GOOD. RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD PROPAGATION. GOOD...

THEY MOVED OUT OF THE PLANT...
THEN HE IS FREE TO FOLLOW HIS CHOICE OF ENDEAVOR...
A FREE ENTERPRISE SOCIETY?


OF COURSE! AFTER YOU...
NO! I...I'D RATHER WALK...

TARLTON WALKED ALONG BESIDE HIS ROBOT GUIDE SURVEYING THE SPARKLING CITY...
WHERE IS THE BLUE ROBOT ASSEMBLY PLANT?
THE BLUE ROBOTS? WELL...YOU'LL HAVE TO GO OVER TO BLUE TOWN...ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE CITY FOR THAT."


BLUE TOWN?
WELL. YOU KNOW. THEY ALL LIVE OVER THERE. WE CALL IT BLUE TOWN, IT'S JUST THE SECTION. WE'D BETTER TAKE A MOBILE-BUS...IT'S A LONG WALK...


THEY STOOD UNDER THE BUS STATION SHED, TARLTON SURVEYING THE TWO BENCHES...
YOU... DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN BLUE ROBOTS AND ORANGE ROBOTS?
OF COURSE! OTHERWISE THERE'D BE TROUBLE! HAVE TO KEEP THEM IN THEIR PLACE, YOU KNOW...
BUS ST
BLUE

TARLTON NODDED. THE BUS ARRIVED. THEY BOARDED IT. TARLTON MOVED TOWARD THE BACK...
NO! UP HERE... IN FRONT!
OH! YES! I SEE...
BLUE

THE BUS ZOOMED OFF SOUTHWARD THROUGH THE CITY.
WHILE WE'RE RIDING, I COULD SHOW YOU SOME POINTS OF INTEREST...
I'D APPRECIATE IT...

THEY SPED PAST A LARGE IMPOSING STRUCTURE OUTSIDE A LINE OF ORANGE ROBOTS WAITED PATIENTLY
A RECHARGING STATION! THERE OUR POWER UNITS ARE SUPPLIED WITH ENERGY WHEN THEY NEED IT...
SIMILAR TO A RESTAURANT FOR HUMANS, I SEE...
ORANGE ONLY
STATION
SOON THE MOBILE-BUS ENTERED A SEEDY SECTION OF THE CITY. THE BUILDINGS NO LONGER SHINED THE STREETS WERE CROWDED WITH BLUE ROBOTS
AND THIS IS BLUE TOWN.
YES. THERE'S THE PLANT... THE BLUE ASSEMBLY PLANT!
TARLTON AND HIS ROBOT GUIDE ALIGHT FROM THE MOBILE-BUS AND IT SPED OFF
YOU'D BETTER GO ON IN ALONE, TARLTON. I'LL WAIT OUT HERE!
HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN THE BLUE PLANT?
THE GUIDE SHOOK HIS HEAD...
NO! I HARDLY EVER EVEN COME TO BLUE TOWN.
COME IN WITH ME. I WANT YOU TO. IT MIGHT PROVE INTERESTING.
TARLTON MOVED INTO THE BUILDING, HIS ORANGE GUIDE FOLLOWING SHYLY. A BLUE ROBOT CAME TO MEET HIM...
ALLOW ME TO APOLOGIZE FOR THE APPEARANCE OF OUR PLANT, TARLTON. OUR FUNDS ARE LIMITED.
I UNDERSTAND...
THE BLUE ROBOT GUIDED TARLTON INTO THE PARTS DEPARTMENT
THIS IS WHERE OUR UNITS ARE CONSTRUCTED
NOTICE, MY FRIEND THEY USE THE SAME ALLOY IN THEIR PARTS AS YOU DO.
I... I SEE...
...THEN ON TO THE ASSEMBLY LINE...
NOTICE THE INTERNAL UNITS, MY FRIEND. THE SAME DESIGNS, THE ORIGINAL DESIGNS NO IMPROVEMENT! NO DIFFERENCE! EXACTLY LIKE YOURS!
WE—WE KNOW THAT TARLTON...
5

AND FINALLY TO THE SHEATHING STAGE...

IT IS ONLY *HERE*, MY FRIEND, WITH THE *BLUE SHEATHINGS*, THAT A *DIFFERENCE* CAN BE *DETECTED*, BUT THE *SHEATHINGS* ARE ONLY *OUTSIDE COVERINGS*. THE *INSIDE STRUCTURES* ARE NO *DIFFERENT* THAN YOURS...

THE SHEATHINGS *MAKE* THAT DIFFERENCE TO THE *ORANGE ROBOTS*, TARLTON!

IT LIMITS US TO *MENIAL JOBS*, SENDS US TO THE *REAR* OF *MOBILE-BUSES*... PLACES US IN *DIFFERENT RECHARGING STATIONS*... FORCES US TO LIVE IN A *SPECIAL SECTION* OF THE CITY...

AND WHEN A *BLUE* ROBOT IS *COMPLETED*... *THEN WHAT*...?

HE IS *TESTED*, THEN PLACED IN THE '*EDUCATOR*', TARLTON. ORLY *THIS* EDUCATOR IS A '*BLUE*' EDUCATOR! IT HASN'T THE *ADVANTAGES* OF THE '*ORANGE*' EDUCATOR...

TELL ME, MY FRIEND.

...WOULD YOU DENY THAT THE *DIFFERENCES* BETWEEN *YOU* AND THE *BLUE* ROBOTS ARE *TAUGHT* IN YOUR '*EDUCATOR*'?

I... I COULDN'T *DENY* THAT, TARLTON

THE 'EDUCATOR' IS THE PARENTS AND THE RELATIVES AND THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE SCHOOL ALL ROLLED INTO ONE, EH?

I... I DON'T UNDERSTAND THOSE WORDS, TARLTON.

NO! I GUESS *YOU WOULDN'T*! YOU *SAID* BEFORE THAT THIS WAS A *FREE ENTERPRISE SOCIETY*. THAT *AFTER* AN ORANGE ROBOT SERVES ITS TIME OR THE ABDENBLT LINE, THAT IT IS *FREE TO FOLLOW ITS* OWN *CHOICE OF ENDEAVOR*.

I... I SAID THAT, YES.

THAT OF COURSE, DOES NOT INCLUDE THE *BLUE* ROBOTS, EH? *THEIR* CHOICES OF ENDEAVOR ARE *LIMITED*...

YOU ARE *LECTURING ME* AS THOUGH ALL THIS WERE *MY* FAULT, TARLTON! THIS *EXISTED* LONG BEFORE *I* WAS *MADE*! WHAT CAN *I* DO ABOUT IT? I'M ORLY *ONE ROBOT*!

I AM *SORRY* MY FRIEND! YES, I *KNOW* YOU ARE ONLY *ONE ROBOT* THAT IS WHY I AM AFRAID THAT *CYBRINIA* IS NOT YET *READY* TO JOIN THE GREAT GALACTIC REPUBLIC...

NO, WAIT, TARLTON...

TARLTON MOVED OUT OF THE BLUE ASSEMBLY PLANT THROUGH BLUE TOWN. THE ORANGE ROBOT HURRIED AFTER HIM...

WHY, TARLTON? *WHY* AREN'T WE READY?

ASK *YOURSELF*! THAT, MY FRIEND! TELL YOUR *FELLOW ROBOTS* TO ASK *THEMSELVES* THAT QUESTION!

TARLTON MOVED FAST THE ROBOT CLANKED AFTER HIM...

IS...IS THERE ANY *HOPE*, TARLTON? *FOR US*?

OF COURSE THERE IS!

TARLTON STOPPED BELOW HIS GLEAMING ROCKET

OF COURSE THERE'S *HOPE* FOR *YOU*, MY FRIEND. FOR A WHILE, ON *EARTH*, IT LOOKED LIKE THERE WAS *NO HOPE*! BUT WHEN MANKIND ON EARTH LEARNED TO *LIVE TOGETHER*, *REAL* PROGRESS FIRST *BEGAN*. THE *UNIVERSE* WAS *SUDDENLY OURS*.

...AND WHEN *WE* LEARN TO LIVE TOGETHER...

THE UNIVERSE WILL BE *YOURS TOO*. GOOD-BYE, MY FRIEND!

GOOD-BYE, TARLTON.

THE SHIP ROARED UP INTO THE NIGHT SKY. IT ROARED INTO THE INFINITE VOID OF SPACE...INTO THE ENDLESS COSMIC VACUUM! IT ROARED TOWARD GLORIOUS EARTH...

AND INSIDE THE SHIP, THE MAN REMOVED HIS SPACE HELMET AND SHOOK HIS HEAD, AND THE INSTRUMENT LIGHTS MADE THE BEADS OF PERSPIRATION ON HIS DARK SKIN TWINKLE LIKE DISTANT STARS—

THE END

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